

Korean Popular Culture and Transcultural Consumption: Globalized Desires between "Ours and Others"¹

For the next step [of *Hallyu*], we shouldn't have that name. Specially, Hal [Han] in *Hallyu* actually means Korea. So, I think from now on, if you really want to take it to the next level, maybe we shouldn't have a name like that ... [Before] it was basically about introducing Korea, Korean songs, Korean dramas. And hopefully I think it can be changed into something like, sharing. You know, mutual understanding through cultural sharing.

— From the public lecture of JYP, a singer and music producer, at the forum "*Hallyu* in Asia: A Dialogue" held at Harvard University on February 16, 2007

South Korean popular culture has circulated globally since the late 1990s. Broadly, its global popularity can be observed in two major cultural phenomena: *Hallyu* (한류, 韓流), which is more evident in the Asian region; and cult fandom of the Korean genre film, which is more evident in the West.² The literal translation of *Hallyu* is "Korean Wave" and this term refers to the regional popularity of South Korean cultural products such as cinema, television drama, popular music, and fashion within Asia. The origin of *Hallyu* can be traced back to the success of the South Korean television drama, *What Is Love?* (*Sarang-i Muwolle* 1991).³ When *What Is Love?* was screened in China on CCTV (Chinese Central Television) in June 1997, its audience share was 16.6%, which is the highest record achieved by any foreign drama series to be broadcast in China up to that time (M. J. Lee 2006: 77).⁴ Besides the early success of South Korean television drama in China, *Hallyu* also expanded into cinema with the regional success of the blockbuster film *Shiri* (1999) in Asia. In Japan, for example, *Shiri* sold over 1.2 million tickets (S. M. Kim 2001: 121).⁵ Following *Shiri*'s success, the films *My Sassy Girl* (*Yeopgyeogin Geunyeo* 2001) and *My Wife Is a Gangster* (*Jopok Munna* 2001) also reached number one at the box office in several Asian countries including Hong Kong and Singapore. In Hong Kong, *My Sassy Girl* stayed at the box office number one spot for two weeks and its total box office revenue was more than US\$1.7 million (Korean Film Council 2004). *Hallyu* was also evident in popular music: a South Korean female singer, BoA, became a regional superstar in Asia after all her albums and a number of

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her singles reached the top of Japan's *Oricon* music chart.⁶ However, it was not until April 2003 when the drama *Winter Sonata* (*Gyeongju Yeonga* 2002) was first screened on NHK (*Nippon Hoso Kyokai*/Japan Broadcasting Corporation) that *Hallyu* became the regional popular cultural phenomenon within Asia that it is today.⁷ The enormous popularity of *Winter Sonata* in countries such as Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China created "the *Yonsama* syndrome," which refers to the phenomenal stardom of *Winter Sonata*'s male lead, Bae Yong-Joon (BYJ). A year later, in 2004, another South Korean drama, *Full House* (*Pulhuseu* 2004), was screened in the region, where it also achieved around 50% of the average audience share in countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Hong Kong (JYPE 2006; E. J. Lee 2006).⁸ The success of *Full House* helped contribute to the regional stardom of *Full House*'s male lead, Rain, who was later selected by *Time* magazine as one of "the world's most influential 100 people" in 2006 (Walsh 2006). Finally, a historical costume drama, *Dae-jang-geum* (2003–2004) has achieved phenomenal popularity in various regions. Since 2004, the drama has been widely broadcast in more than sixty countries around the world, including Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, Japan, Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, India, Iran, all the Arabic countries (through Dubai satellite television), Australia, the U.S., Canada, Russia, Uzbekistan, Turkey, Hungary, Ghana, and Zimbabwe (J. Y. Kim 2008).⁹

In addition to the regional phenomenon of *Hallyu*, the recent Western embrace of the South Korean genre film also exemplifies the global circulation of South Korean popular culture. In 2003, the well-known UK magazine, *New Statesman*, wrote of South Korean genre films: "It was South Korea that emerged as the new home of excitingly extreme Asian cinema, with bizarre export offerings ranging from the acclaimed serial-killer thriller *Memories of Murder*, through the ghostly chiller *A Tale of Two Sisters*, to the revenge-laden comic-book fable *Oldboy*" (Kemmode 2004). The popularity of these genre films in the West was first evident in the international film festival circuit where the films were critically acclaimed. Bong Joon-Ho's *Memories of Murder* (*Sarin-ui Chuseok* 2003) won the Director's Prize at the 2003 San Sebastian International Film Festival and the Cognac International Thriller Film Festival (Cine21 2003). In 2004, Park Chan-Wook's *Oldboy* (2003) won the Grand Prize at the Cannes International Film Festival (Cine21 2004a). Some of these genre films also went on to achieve commercial success in some Western film markets such as in the US, the UK, Italy, and France. For example, the copyright of *A Tale of Two Sisters* (*Janghwa Hongryeon* 2003) was sold to DreamWorks, a major American film company which intends to remake the film for Hollywood, for US\$2 million. This was the highest selling price at the time for Asian film copyrights bought by Hollywood (Film2.0 2003). *Oldboy* is another example of a commercially successful Korean genre film in the West: it established a new record as the best-selling Asian film in the UK in December 2004 (H. L. Kim 2004).¹⁰ Besides the international film festival circuit and Western commercial success, the recent Western embrace

of the South Korean genre film is also apparent from film review Internet websites, such as IMDb.com, Rottenomatoes.com, BeyondHollywood.com, and Twitch.net. These websites provide detailed information and reviews of the latest South Korean genre films and it is from these websites that Western cult fandom can be observed. In particular, it is evident that *Oldboy* has inspired a new level of online cult fandom of the Korean genre film as an unprecedented number of film website users have praised the extreme violence of *Oldboy*'s main protagonist, Dae-Soo.

The above examples of *Hallyu* and Western cult fandom show the ways in which contemporary South Korean popular culture travels across national and cultural borders. It appears that contemporary South Korean popular culture is hybridized and influenced by various foreign cultures through transcultural flows largely facilitated by advanced media technology and globalization. This hybridity contributes to the aspect of *mugukjeok* (무국적, 無國籍, non-nationality) in globalized South Korean popular culture, which is the principal trait that enables South Korean popular culture to be globally consumed. In his book, *Recentring Globalization*, Koichi Iwabuchi suggests the concept of "*mukokuseki*" (non-nationality or non-Japaneseness), where he emphasizes "culturally odorless" aspects of Japanese consumer products such as the Sony Walkman or computer games. He argues that the trait of being culturally odorless *mukokuseki* in these Japanese consumer products is one of the main reasons behind their global popularity. In this book, I use the term *mugukjeok*, the Korean equivalent for Japanese *mukokuseki*, which shares the same Chinese characters "無國籍" with *mukokuseki*. I use the concept of *mugukjeok* here within the paradigm of transcultural hybridity, to refer to how popular cultural flows enable the mixing of particular cultural elements (national, traditional, and specific) with globally popular cultural elements, which then causes those particular cultural elements to become less culturally specific. Thus, the concept of *mugukjeok* in this book does not mean complete odorlessness or non-nationality; rather, *mugukjeok* implies the transcultural hybridity of popular culture, which is not only influenced by odorless global elements, but also by traditional (national) elements.¹¹

The quote by JYP at the beginning of this chapter regarding the notion of deleting "*Hal*" (*Hal*, 韓, Korea/ness) from *Hallyu* can be understood within the paradigm of global *mugukjeok*. The *mugukjeok* traits in South Korean popular culture are particularly evident in the newly constructed hybrid Korean masculinities as represented by BYJ of *Winter Sonata*, Rain of *Full House*, and Dae-Soo of *Oldboy*. Many forms of non-Korean global masculinities — such as metrosexual, cute (Japanese かわいさ, *kuwaini*), and cool masculinities — cross cultural boundaries through disjunctive media cultural flows and hybridize contemporary South Korean masculinity. The consequent hybridity of South Korean masculinity creates *mugukjeok* traits which, in turn, contribute to its global popularity. Nevertheless, JYP's concept of the deletion of Koreanness from *Hallyu* does not fully explain the *mugukjeok* traits of hybrid Korean masculinity because his view ignores South

Korea's local specificity which forms the context surrounding the creation of South Korean popular cultural products. For example, it is a specific type of South Korean traditional masculinity, Confucian *seonbi* (선비), scholar-official) masculinity, that is the basis for *mugukjeok* South Korean masculinity. Therefore, instead of using JYP's concept of the deletion of Koreanness from *Hallyu*, I argue that the *mugukjeok* traits of South Korean masculinity have to be explained through the notion of the transformation and reconstruction of South Koreanness that are driven by the "transcultural" hybridization processes between Korean traditional masculinities and global masculinities.

This book investigates the hybridity of contemporary South Korean popular culture and the transcultural desire of audiences in the various regional markets using the example of hybrid South Korean masculinity, based on a series of empirical reception studies of audiences in Japan, Singapore, and the West. It is argued that South Korean masculinity is hybridized and transformed due to disjunctive globalizations and transculturations, where South Korean masculinity is multifariously reconstructed and re-identified based on the ambivalent desires of audiences who mobilize mixed cultural practices arising from *mugukjeok* and the local specificities of each region.¹² These local specificities are driven by the particular reciprocal and contextual relationships between South Korea and each region that is evident from postcolonialism (Japan), trans-pop-consumerism (Singapore), and neo-Orientalism (the West). Through examining these three different sets of contextual specificities, this book demonstrates the different ways in which the ambivalent desires of each set of regional viewers embrace hybrid South Korean masculinities, which include soft masculinity, global masculinity, and postmodern masculinity.

To carry out the empirical research for this book, I employed methodologies such as participant observation, data collection through interviews and archival research, and survey research through questionnaires. I conducted both individual and focus group interviews with more than thirty interviewees and collected more than a hundred completed questionnaires in Japan, Singapore, and Australia.¹³ To maintain the confidentiality of the participants, I use pseudonyms in this book to indicate each participant. Apart from the pre-arranged interviews, I coordinated additional interviews with owners and managers of DVD/CD shops and with a director of a film distribution company at the actual field research sites. In addition, I interviewed Park Chan-Wook, the director of *Oldboy*; Milka Kuroiwa, an NHK producer in Japan; Lee Gyeong-Hui, the chief editor of the *Hallyu* magazine, *Platinum*; and Christian Wete, a brand manager of the film distribution company, Madman, in Australia. Because the sample size is relatively small, they cannot be representative of audiences of each cultural group. However, this research shows the different kinds of newly emerging transcultural consumption practices of global audiences in various popular culture consumer markets. In particular, in order

to collect more reliable and up-to-date data on these groups of audiences, I have conducted longitudinal analysis of small sample groups. For example, apart from interviews and questionnaires, I have spent more than two years on follow-up research to further discover and define the characteristics of each audience group. This follow-up research has included close and constant observation of fan club website forums and film review websites, frequent emailing and online chatting with these audience groups and content analysis of newspaper and magazine articles which contain information on these audience groups. As a result of such persistent longitudinal research I was able to collect detailed and in-depth data on the various regional audiences of South Korean popular culture. Such longitudinal empirical research has also enabled me to come to an understanding of the diversity of the consumption practices of these regional audiences in relation to South Korean masculinity.

This chapter contextualizes the trajectories of studies on South Korean popular culture and the hybridization dynamics of transculturation on the one hand, and the conceptual background of the reconstruction of South Korean masculinity on the other. As briefly mentioned above, there are many examples that can demonstrate transculturation and hybridization in the realm of contemporary South Korean popular culture. Due to the limited scope of this chapter, I shall only discuss the most significant example — the Korean blockbuster.

Transculturation and Globalization in South Korean Popular Culture: The Case of the Korean Blockbuster

Hangukbyeong Beulleokbeoseuteo: Globalized and Spectacularized "Huan"

In 1999, the Korean blockbuster (한국형 볼락비스트), *Hangukbyeong Beulleokbeoseuteo* emerged and gained nationwide popularity. The term was first used by South Korean daily newspapers when *Toemarek* was released in mid-1998 (B. C. Kim 2005). In the same year that the production plan for *Shiri* was announced, the South Korean media started to use the term *Hangukbyeong Beulleokbeoseuteo* regularly (G. E. Lee 2001). Its use dramatically increased after the unparalleled success of *Shiri*. By June 11, 1999, 119 days after its release, *Shiri* had sold over 5.8 million tickets nationwide, breaking the record that had been set by *Titanic* in South Korea in 1998 (S. Y. Chang 2000: 408). In *Shiri*, North Korean terrorists obtain CTX, a potent new liquid explosive, by hijacking and threaten to use it against South Korea. Agents from the South Korean secret intelligence service attempt to track down the terrorists. For melodramatic effect, the film's director, Kang Je-Gyu, adds a tragic love story between a South Korean agent and a North Korean female spy who become lovers and who eventually end up putting guns to each other's heart. As the film's slogan, "Korean-style action blockbuster," indicates, the film

contains Hollywood action blockbuster genre characteristics such as “edge-of-your-seat action, suspense, blood, sweat, and emotion” (Altman 1999: 46). In terms of production and distribution, *Shiri* also follows the conventional characteristics of Hollywood blockbuster genre films, which are high-budget and wide-release. The total budget of *Shiri* was US\$2.5 million, which was the highest production cost of a single film in South Korean film history up to 1999. Also, the film was played on 588 screens, which represented almost one third of the total number of screens (1,856) in South Korea at the time (G. H. Lee 2007a).

Shiri is often praised because of its seamless combination of spectacle — adapted from the Hollywood action blockbusters — and the pervading presence of indigenous South Korean content that stem from the national memory of loss (caused by the traumatic split between North and South Korea) and the national desire for reunification. *Shiri* depicts typical images of action films: car chases, explosions, and gunfights. In terms of spectacle, *Shiri* gained the approval of critics and audiences alike because of these action sequences. The film presents nine spectacular sequences at roughly thirteen-minute intervals in 123 minutes of total running time (G. W. Kim 2002: 49). It starts with a shockingly violent scene of North Korean guerrillas in training. This strategy of using a shocking scene in the beginning of the film follows the “five-minute rule” of successful Hollywood films, which is that a film only has five minutes to grab the audience’s attention (G. W. Kim 2002: 48–49). Following this scene in *Shiri*, even bigger spectacles are shown, the biggest of which is a massive scene set in the Olympic stadium which is filled with 50,000 extras. It is these action scenes that exemplify how *Shiri* embodies the characteristics of the Hollywood blockbuster.

Since *Shiri*’s release and its subsequent enormous success, the South Korean media has taken an optimistic view of the future of South Korean cinema, which has shown that it can beat Hollywood giants like *Titanic*. “Some of the media noted that *Shiri*’s total production budget is only about two minutes of *Titanic*’s” and “some argued that while those culturally advanced countries like France and Japan struggle as they are attacked by Hollywood productions, Korea is the only one who is defeating them, in spite of IMF intervention” (G. W. Kim 2002: 19). In this euphoric climate, *Shiri*’s success was quickly followed by bigger blockbusters.¹⁴ Another film featuring the split between North and South Korea, *Joint Security Area* (*Gongdong Gyeongbi Guyok*/JSA 2000), sold over 6.5 million tickets in 2000, and in the following year, the nostalgic gangster noir *Friend* (*Chingu* 2001), sold over 8 million tickets (Korean Film Council 2001; 2002). On February 18, 2004, another Korean blockbuster, *Shinddo* (2004), broke the box-office record again, selling 10 million tickets nationwide. Two months later, the war blockbuster, *Taegukgi* (*Taegukgi Hwarinallimyeo* 2004), broke *Shinddo*’s record in only two weeks. In 2005, another film with a Korean War setting, *Welcome to Dongmakgol* (2005), also ranked high in the South Korean box office by selling more than 8 million tickets (Korean Film Council 2006).

The obvious commonality shared by the above films (except *Friend*) is the presentation of indigenous themes, such as the Korean War and the reunification issue, within the globalized cultural form of the Hollywood blockbuster. The success of these films lies in the retelling of the trauma of the Korean War. This trauma has engraved its symbolic meaning of *haan* on South Korea’s national identity, which then became a driving force behind the success of the films in the domestic market. The Korean blockbusters have clearly mobilized the notion of *haan* to appeal to the South Korean psyche. The meaning of *haan* is peculiar to Korea; it is intrinsically and intricately connected with the everyday lives of Koreans.¹⁵ Korean *haan* can be compared to African-American *blues* in terms of oppression and emotional expression: “It is the ethos of groups or racial mourning. Many years of social injustice, political oppression, economic exploitation, or foreign invasions create the collective unconscious *haan* or *blues*” (Min et al. 2003: 6–9). For Koreans, *haan* evokes a sense of shared destiny and suffering that is considered vital to the building of a national identity (Allen 1999: 129). *Haan* has been one of the most significant themes of Korean national film over the past decades.

Besides the South Korean domestic market, some of these blockbuster films, like *Shiri* and *Taegukgi*, have also achieved significant success in some overseas markets such as the US, Japan, and Hong Kong (Cine21 2004b; Cine21 2004c).¹⁶ The noticeable global recognition of these films is the result of transcultural media entertainment flows, where the Korean indigenous theme of *haan* has been spectacularized and globalized within the paradigm of the globally popular genre form of the Hollywood action blockbuster. For instance, in *Taegukgi*, the theme of *haan* is portrayed through the characters of two brothers who are separated and find themselves on opposite sides of the border between North and South during the Korean War. This separation of the two brothers is a poignant analogy of the divided nation of North and South Korea. The film’s director, Kang Je-Gyu, portrays this national sentiment within the Hollywood action blockbuster form, depicting realistic battle scenes that are reminiscent of the Omaha beach sequence of a Hollywood film, *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). As Ethan Alter writes:

[*Taegukgi*] bears an unmistakable Hollywood imprim. Kang uses every convention in the book, from the ragtag squad of colorful misfits to the corny framing device that bookends the film. Still, the movie’s scope overcomes its generic narrative: The battle scenes are terrifically filmed, often reaching *Private Ryan*’s level of intensity, and despite your better judgment, you do get caught up in the melodrama. (2005)

As the above quote suggests, *Taegukgi* demonstrates the influence that Hollywood films can have on the work of non-Hollywood filmmakers. In this case, *Taegukgi* exemplifies cultural hybridity, where the national sentiment of *haan*,

represented in a melodramatic plot, is incorporated into the globalized media aesthetic form of the Hollywood blockbuster. By narrating Korea's historical trauma through the Hollywood blockbuster genre, these culturally hybridized films become both familiar and unfamiliar to non-Korean audiences, and it is such cultural hybridity that is the crucial factor in helping these Korean blockbusters travel across national and cultural boundaries.

Shiri, Uncanny Amalgamation between Ours and Others

Many South Korean scholars link the success of the Korean blockbuster with the context of the economic rise and fall of South Korea after the 1988 Seoul Olympics. South Korea began to be referred to as a "dragon economy," along with Singapore, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. In this economically affluent period, South Koreans were optimistic about a strong economic future. With the prospect of a national average income of US\$10,000, this sanguine mood reached its peak when South Korea became the twenty-ninth regular member of the Organization for Economic Co-operation Development (OECD) on December 12, 1996 (G. W. Kim 2002: 16). In 1997, however, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) crisis occurred unexpectedly. The economy collapsed under the accumulated contradictions of overextended *chaebol* (or *jaebol*) — family-controlled conglomerates in South Korea), insolvent banks, and inflexible labor markets, and Korea began an unfamiliar era of economic depression and social dislocation (B. K. Kim 2000: 173). All of a sudden, South Korean society panicked as the number of homeless and jobless people escalated. In response to this, rapid globalization was advocated by the South Korean government, which proposed that business had to be stimulated to produce global commodities in order to overcome this economic depression. As Rob Wilson argues:

Given the era of rampant globalization and the cybernetic transgression of all media and national borders, President Kim Dae-joong has advocated opening South Korea ever more dramatically to foreign trade and investment, under the IMF-challenged slogan of "globalization," as some kind of hegemonic neo-liberal solution to the Asian recession and currency crisis. Korea seems to be fast coming undone, as coherent national-film imaginary, in these rampant global/local dialectics. (2001: 310)

The 1997 IMF economic catastrophe changed the whole paradigm of South Korean society rapidly and triggered a new national trauma in South Korean modern history. In this chaotic, and what was perceived as a shameful, moment, *Shiri* arrived at what, in hindsight, looked like the right historical time in South Korean modern history to heal the trauma. Before filming took place,

Shiri's director, Kang Je-Gyu, declared that "he would make a Korean-style action blockbuster which would equally match Hollywood ones" (G. W. Kim 2002: 18). When the film did, in fact, triumph over Hollywood blockbusters at the box office, *Shiri* gave hope to South Koreans that South Korean blockbusters could be as good as those of the Americans (2002: 17–21). As some film critics have observed, the most remarkable factor of *Shiri*'s success was, ironically, the IMF crisis. For example, the film critic, Kang Han-Seop, argues that the success of *Shiri* was due to the exceptional explosion of patriotism in the era of economic crisis rather than the film's quality (2003: 66). Another film critic, Byeon Seong-Chan, argues that "uncanny nationalism did its work [on the success of *Shiri*], which had spread in the whole society in the form of collective unconsciousness after the IMF crisis" (2004: 42). Kim Gyeong-Wook also points out that *Shiri*'s success is a mysterious social phenomenon caused by an irrational and non-critical frenzy and collective enthusiasm for nationalism, and observes that "some people have claimed that *Shiri* won victory in restoring independence to Korean cinema which had been colonized by Hollywood" (2002: 6). She also argues that after the economic currency collapse and the subsequent IMF intervention, a complex social phenomenon emerged in South Korean society. This phenomenon was a mixture of a sense of shame about "ours" and frantic enthusiasm for America as a progressive symbol of globalization (2002: 18–21). Kim Gyeong-Wook's position is that *Shiri* represents a re-emergence of South Korean national identity and also expresses the ambivalence by South Koreans towards globalization. This ambivalence towards globalization can be seen in the way that *Shiri* appeals to the most intimate "national" sentiment of South Koreans — *haan* — by means of the most globalized cinematic form of the Hollywood blockbuster. This ambivalence was, in fact, already evident at the very beginning of South Korean cinema. Joo Chang-Gyu highlights this contradictory nature:

There are already contradictory powers working within the concept of "Korean cinema" since cinema itself, which is obviously rooted in the West, flowed into this country through its colonial experience by means of the extension of capitalism, and it adapted to the non-Western public as a form of national entertainment. What are the persistent characteristics of Korean cinema history, which is a mixture of colonialism, capitalism, nationalism, and the consciousness of working class people? (2001: 184)

As Joo argues above, South Korean cinema was initially contradictory in its birth because it was based on the Western technology of film, but this Western technology eventually became localized to South Korea's socio-political context, which is a mixture of such historical events as colonialism, capitalism, and nationalism. This, I suggest, describes the cultural hybridization of South

Korean cinema. Jo's notion of Korean cinema as "contradictory" and "a mixture" remains crucial to the discussion of the ambivalent traits of *Shiri*. The history of the film's success shows contemporary South Korean cinema's ambivalent state where the national sentiment of *haan* was encroached upon by globalization, and Hollywood film conventions were absorbed into the South Korean national identity.

In *The Fantasy of Blockbuster: Narcissism of Korean Cinema*, Kim Gyeong-Wook severely criticizes such cultural absorption that characterizes South Korean cinema's uncritical imitation of Hollywood. She states: "under the US-led globalization dynamics [after the IMF crisis], Korea obsessively learned how to completely mimic American culture, socio-economic system and lifestyle] and how the whole Korean society could be Americanized" (2002: 17). Kim further argues that *Shiri* is located somewhere where Korea(n cinema) discards "Ours" (Koreanness) and obtains something "Americanized" which is disguised as globalization (2002: 18). She also applies this criticism to post-*Shiri* films such as *Phantom* (Kuryong 1999), *Bichunmoo* (2000), and *The Warrior (Musa* 2001). For her, *Phantom* is another Hollywood copy while the other two films are benchmarking products of Hong Kong and Japanese martial arts films that demonstrate South Korean cinema's desire to become global (or non-national/*mugukjeok*) (2002: 20–21). Here, Kim's criticism brings a fundamental question. If, as Jo Chang-Gyu has argued above, the origin of South Korean cinema is "contradictory" and "a mixture," how can South Korean cinema's "Koreanness" be defined? A film critic, Kang Han-Seop, points out that the current mainstream film discourses in South Korea reflect South Korea's inferiority complex and shows its yearning for originality and purity. He states:

South Korean cinema today has not been forcefully constructed by Hollywood ... For the past 100 years, it has been naturally developed through the reciprocal collision, restraint and adaptation between filmmakers, capitalists (cinema owners and investors), and audiences within the fluctuating changes in different levels and aspects of South Korean cinema. (2004: 129–30)

Kang further argues that South Korean cinema can only be identified by the form and content of *today's* South Korean cinema, which is based on the cultural evolution point of view (2004: 130). Kang's argument clearly demonstrates how South Korean cinema can neither be pure Korean nor completely dominated by Hollywood, and how the question regarding the seeking of "Koreanness" in the South Korean cinema discourse is in contradiction to its hybrid identity. Thus, I suggest that the Korean blockbuster has to be understood within the framework of cultural hybridization rather than within a cultural imperialist paradigm that erects the false dichotomies of Korean/non-Korean, ours/others, subordinate/dominant.

The Korean Blockbuster: An Indigenized Global Form

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha argues that colonial presence and its ambivalent identity are revealed when the subordinate culture recognizes dominating discourses "as they articulate the signs of cultural difference and re-implement them within the deferential relations of colonial power" (1994: 110). This discrimination process between colonial culture and its double, the subordinate culture, is represented through disavowal. It is this that creates colonial hybridity. As Bhabha argues:

Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the "pure" and original identity of authority). Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. (1994: 112)

Bhabha's theory of postcolonial mimicry is emblemized in his phrase, "almost the same, but not quite." This phrase illustrates the fact that when the subordinate culture copies colonial or the dominant culture, local practices of reinterpretation and redeployment always occur and create "difference" between the original and its double. He also argues that between the Western (dominant) sign and its colonial signification, "a map of misreading" has emerged in the subordinate culture which highlights the subordinate's sovereign ability to accept or reject the dominant culture. Supporting this point, Leela Gandhi also argues that colonial mimicry is "an ambivalent mixture of deference and disobedience" (1998: 149). These points tie in with Roland Robertson's "glocalization" theory, which emphasizes the mitigating effects of local conditions on global pressures (1995). These arguments above all acknowledge the indigenous/subordinate culture's ability to discern and reinterpret the authority of the dominant culture.

However, as seen in the earlier section, the cultural imperialist argument in the South Korean cinema discourse only stresses Hollywood/America's dominant influence on South Korean cinema. This argument, which interprets the global omnipresence of the Hollywood film by using the dichotomies of dominant/dominated and center/periphery, creates a homogeneous view of global audiences. Such a paradigm is based on the false assumption that such global audiences blindly absorb Hollywood/American values without reinterpreting them. In this paradigm, globalization is simply the synonym of a blanket Americanization of the world as led by Hollywood. In *Modernity at Large*, however, Arjun Appadurai asserts that "globalization does not necessarily or even frequently imply homogenization or Americanization ..." (1996: 17). He argues that various cultures and ideologies are brought into new societies and they tend to become indigenized in one way

or another (1990: 295). Anthony Giddens also suggests that globalization is increasingly becoming “de-centered,” that is, that globalization is not under the control of particular nations or large corporations (1999). Rico Lie also argues that “cultural imperialism is no longer seen as an adequate way to denote the process of intercultural contact and changing cultures,” and provides Reebee Garofalo’s summary of the four weaknesses of the theory of cultural imperialism. First, the theory of cultural imperialism overstates external determinants and undervalues the internal dynamics of localities; second, it conflates economic power with cultural effects; third, it assumes that audiences are passive and renders local creativity less significant; and fourth, it often creates the patronizing view that the authentic and organic native culture of the developing world is under siege by the synthetic and inauthentic culture of the developed West (quoted in Lie 2003: 59).

In contrast to the above critics who emphasize the adaptive power of local cultures, the cultural imperialist view only highlights South Korean cinema’s mimetic tendencies and its neo-colonial desire of the dominant culture that is Hollywood while failing to acknowledge local power dynamics such as the ability to discriminate and re-examine the dominant culture. As Koichi Iwabuchi also asserts, the concept of cultural imperialism implies that the recipients of dominant culture consume this culture automatically and without a critical cultural lens (2002a: 39). In the light of this, I suggest that the cultural imperialist perspective is inadequate to explain the current phenomenon of hybridity in South Korean cinema because it overlooks three major points. First, the premise that South Korean cinema “discards Koreanness” is not applicable since South Korean cinema has always been “contradictory” in nature and has been “a mixture” of local and foreign influences. Second, it ignores the ability of South Korean audiences to make critical judgments of Hollywood blockbuster conventions. Third, it ignores the hybridized presence of South Korean cinema through the articulation of difference through postcolonial mimicry.

Finding Its Lack: Similar but Different

In her article, “Disappearing South Korean Women: Unconscious Optics of the Korean Blockbuster,” Kim So-Young argues that *Hangukhyeong Beulleokbesuteo* is “a local translation of the Hollywood blockbuster” since it contains Korea’s geopolitical space and themes (2001: 28). The term *Hangukhyeong Beulleokbesuteo* (the Korean blockbuster), demonstrates the polarity between its two chief characteristics: “Korea(n)” indicates an indigenous and national identity while “blockbuster” designates the big-budget foreign entertainment influence of Hollywood. Kim points out that this newly coined term explains “how Korea’s geopolitical characteristics are interpreted targeting the local, the Asian region, and the global market in the form of film production” (2001: 27). She argues that the foreign cultural form known as the Hollywood blockbuster has been adapted, modified, and indigenized

to the domestic South Korean market. She points out that it is important to consider how subordinate cultures such as the Korean blockbuster can subvert the dominant practices of the Hollywood blockbuster (2001: 27). Kim’s point is based on Walter Benjamin’s view of translation. In his essay, “The Task of the Translator,” Benjamin highlights the importance of the translator’s effort in differentiating in the translation from the original based on the specific linguistic and contextual aspects of the local. Employing Benjamin’s argument, Kim So-Young suggests that the Korean blockbuster phenomenon has to be discussed within the framework of a local and regional “translation” process, that can also be a “subversive practice,” of the Hollywood blockbuster, rather than a concept of the reproduction of “the same thing” repeatedly (2001: 27). In the article, she clearly points out that “it is obvious that the Korean blockbuster is a repetition of the Hollywood blockbuster. However, the practice of repetition does not always bring about sameness. There is a subversive repetition, as well as a subordinated repetition, in terms of reproduction” (2001: 27).

Kim So-Young’s point aptly explains how local translation practices complicate and hybridize Korean cinema. In fact, “*hyeong*” from “*Hangukhyeong Beulleokbesuteo*” can be interpreted as “style.” Thus, the literal meaning of the term could be “South Korean-style blockbuster,” as distinct from the Hollywood “style” blockbuster. Alternatively, *Hangukhyeong* can also be interpreted as “South Koreanized,” which implies the South Korean indigenization of the Hollywood blockbuster. The best example of this indigenization is, as has been discussed previously, how the national sentiment of *haun* has been spectacularized and globalized through the form of the Hollywood action blockbuster in films such as *Shiri*, *Taegukgi*, and *Joint Security Area*. The term *Hangukhyeong Beulleokbesuteo* thus demonstrates the dynamic relationship between the contradictory processes of globalization and localization.

Kim So-Young’s argument about the *Hangukhyeong Beulleokbesuteo* is important because it introduces the notion that a new style of South Korean film has emerged, one that is an indigenized, localized, and Koreanized version of the Hollywood blockbuster. This view suggests that the recent development in South Korean cinema is a re-adaptation of hegemonic Hollywood culture that has resulted in a new localized form. This can be explained using Roland Robertson’s concept of “glocalization,” which emphasizes how the globalization of a product is more likely to succeed when the product is adapted specifically to each locality or culture that the product is marketed in. According to Robertson, glocalization is “the creation of products or services intended for the global market, but customized to suit the local cultures” (1995: 28). This can also be described by the Japanese term, *dochukuka*, which means “a global outlook adapted to local conditions” (1995: 28). This term comes from the Chinese characters “土着化” (*tu zhuo hua*) which has also been used in South Korea with a different pronunciation “토착화” (*tochakhua*). It refers to “how [certain forms of institution, culture, or customs] have become totally

indigenized and adapted to the local" (Naver Dictionary 2004). Kim So-Young points out that the Korean blockbusters are "a compromise between foreign forms and local materials," offering "both a voluntary mimicry of, as well as imagined resistance to, large Hollywood productions, playing of various logics of both identity and difference in the global cultural industry" (2003). Her argument, acknowledging South Korea's local awareness, is based on the *tochakhuwa* (indigenization) practice in South Korea of the Western blockbuster genre. In an article in the film magazine *Cine21*, "South Korean Cinema Manifesto," Kim So-Young emphasizes the similar (mimicked) and different (indigenized) aspects of hybridity in South Korean cinema in this way:

While Korean cinema surely has its own exclusivity, it also contains non-simultaneous simultaneity with tradition, genre, conventions, and track of thoughts, which the world cinema history has accumulated and has influenced globally and concurrently. Even though the Korean film's domestic market share reached over 50% that means neither we see "pure" Korean films nor we think in a "Korean" way ... it is because the colonies copy the dominant [ideology and cultural forms] and reproduce it. They imagine the copied production as theirs and their own achievement unless the colonies break into the process of the postcolonial transformation. As a non-Western and non-hegemonic country, the speculation of "Korean" cinema would come to notice when this attachment/tie [to the dominant] is cut off or when it is represented why it cannot be cut off. (2004)

Undeniably, the Korean blockbuster syndrome and the tendency of recent South Korean cinema seem to strengthen the connection to Hollywood's dominant cultural productions. Post-IMF crisis films like *Shiri* and *Taegukgi* tend to present Korean content with a "Hollywood tongue" (S. Y. Kim 2001: 27). Kim So-Young's words aptly support my argument that South Korean cinema is not pure but that it is highly hybrid. Her point here is that this hybridity can be called "Korean" as soon as South Korean cinema reveals its difference from, as well as its similarity to, dominant Western culture. Instead of criticizing South Korean cinema's lack of purity, Kim So-Young suggests that this hybridity can be regarded as constituting "Koreanness" in contemporary South Korean cinema discourse.

Similar to Kim So-Young, Chris Berry also argues for understanding South Korean blockbusters in terms of postcolonial indigenization when he discusses the films of Park Chan-Wook. In an interview, Park Chan-Wook says: "at one time, I tried to catch up with Hollywood movies, but it was useless. So, I decided to produce movies that appeal to Koreans' native sentiments" (quoted in Berry 2003: 217). In his breakthrough blockbuster, *Joint Security Area*, Park depicts the poignant relationship between North and South Korean soldiers at Panmunjom, the Korean

DMZ (demilitarized zone) peace village. From being enemies, the soldiers become friends, comrades, and brothers; this deepening relationship between the North and South Korean soldiers in the film demonstrates how the "Joint Security Area" becomes less a site of military stalemate and more a place where warm, brotherly interactions establish strong emotional ties. Through portraying such brotherly interaction, the film romantically embodies the desires of both North and South Koreans for reunification. In this film, Park merges the native sentiments of North and South Korea with the blockbuster genre. This creative merging reflects the hybridity of the South Korean blockbuster which clearly demonstrates "different" aspects from the dominant Hollywood form. Hence, regarding Park's comment about making movies that appeal to the native sentiments of Koreans, Berry emphasizes the "difference" of South Korean cinema and argues that "in borrowing the idea and practice of the blockbuster and adapting them to local circumstances, at the very moment of perceiving a local 'lack' Park simultaneously de-Westernizes it" (2003: 217). In other words, as soon as Park realizes local "lack" — an awareness of difference in the South Korean blockbuster from the dominant culture of Hollywood — and supplements this lack by appealing to South Korea's native sentiments, the Hollywood blockbuster is de-Westernized to become the indigenized *Hangukhyeong Beullokheosuteu*. According to the arguments put forward by Kim So-Young and Berry then, the postcolonial awareness of the "lack" in local culture is arguably the main source of power to create not only hybrid, but also indigenized, South Korean cinema. Their arguments well explain the current tendencies towards hybridization in South Korean popular culture within the framework of disjunctive globalizations.

The theoretical frameworks of Kim So-Young and Berry that focus on the postcolonial awareness of the "lack" in South Korean cinema are important in analyzing the transcultural hybridization of South Korean popular culture. On the other hand, South Korean popular cultural products travel very successfully and are consumed transculturally: for example, the two television drama series, *Winter Sonata* and *Fall House*, have achieved great regional success in Asia and the Western cult fandom of the Korean genre film, *Oldboy*, is significant. As such, South Korean popular culture is no longer a subordinate culture. A new theoretical paradigm is needed to explain its culturally dominant position in regional and global popular culture. While awareness of its lack is the key to understanding the hybridity of South Korean popular culture, the awareness of its "sufficiency" is the key to explain its global success. I argue that its diversity together with the various aspects of its hybridity are the key factors behind its success in the various global markets. The hybridity of South Korean popular culture and its global consumption demonstrate re/adaptation, re/indigenization, and re/formation of the global cultural hegemony. I argue that South Korean popular culture, rather than being imposed upon by outside forces, confronts and adopts foreign cultural identities, forms, and commodities,

and consequently produces a hybrid articulation of South Korean popular culture that enables its movement across cultural boundaries. In other words, the hybridity of South Korean popular culture enables transcultural flow, a flow of culture that is neither uni-directional nor bi-directional, but multi-directional.

Transculturalization

Transculturality as Hybridity

Wolfgang Welsch argues that the most appropriate concept to describe today's cultures is "transculturality." He contrasts the concept of transculturality with three other concepts: the classical concept of single cultures, interculturality, and multiculturalism (1999: 194). The traditional concept of single cultures was first suggested by Johann Gottfried Herder in *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1784–1791). Welsch states that Herder's concept of culture is characterized by three elements: social homogenization, ethnic consolidation, and intercultural delimitation. Regarding the first element, Welsch argues that modern societies are differentiated within themselves to a high degree as evident in the multicultural aspects of everyday lives that have produced differences between classes, genders, and races. The socially homogeneous view of the single cultures concept does not capture the multicultural reality of modern-day societies. Secondly, he argues that the idea of ethnic consolidation is only applicable when cultures are envisaged as "closed spheres or autonomous islands" (1999: 195). This view completely ignores the historical evidence of intercultural mingling. Finally, Welsch describes the third element of the concept of single cultures — intercultural delimitation — as cultural separatism. He argues that this third element is a form of cultural racism.

In relation to the more recent concept of interculturality, Welsch argues that this concept focuses on the conflict between different cultures. He suggests that the concept of interculturality is also problematic because it still stems from an idea of cultures as separate or forming closed islands. Finally, Welsch observes that the concept of multiculturalism espouses the idea of one society as composed of several different cultures. He argues that this concept still shares the same presupposition as the classical concept of single cultures where cultures are clearly distinguished and homogeneous. The only difference is that the concept of multiculturalism implies that these different cultures exist within the one society or community while the concept of single cultures posits each culture as constituting a whole society. Welsch claims that the problem with the concepts of single cultures, interculturality, and multiculturalism is that the term "culture" no longer implies homogeneity and separateness.

Because the description of cultures as islands or spheres does not describe accurately the globalized reality of contemporary societies, Welsch proposes the

concept of transculturality and posits three reasons to support this concept. First, he argues that transculturality is a consequence of the inner differentiation and complexity of modern cultures. Second, he points out that cultures today can no longer be explained by ideas of separatism or homogenization because they are interconnected and entangled with each other. Third, he suggests that today's cultures are characterized by hybridization which can apply at the levels of population, commodities, and information. Therefore, Welsch argues that there is no longer anything absolutely "foreign" or exclusively "our own." For Welsch, transculturalization theory is an alternative to the theory of cultural imperialism which emphasizes homogenization over heterogenization, Westernization over indigenization. In contrast to the cultural imperialism theory, the concept of transculturality prioritizes locality and particularity. This relationship between transculturalization and cultural heterogenization has been explained by many scholars. Lull, for example, argues that "cultural influences always interact with diverse local conditions producing a range of heterogeneous dialogues" (1995: 147). Iwabuchi also suggests that "in contrast to the homogenization thesis, this view [heterogenization] is concerned more with sites of local negotiation. It suggests that foreign goods and texts are creatively misused, recontextualized in local sites, differently interpreted according to local cultural meaning" (2002a: 40). Likewise, what Welsch highlights here is that the concept of transculturality can describe both the homogenizing tendencies of globalization and the heterogenizing aspects of local desires and particularities. Transculturality illustrates the complex relationships between and within cultures today: it emphasizes not isolation but intermingling, not separation but disjunctive interactions, not homogenization but heterogenization.

Welsch's theories on transculturality can help explain the hybrid aspects of contemporary South Korean popular culture, and its ability to flow across cultural boundaries and infiltrate foreign markets, in four ways. First, South Korean popular culture is multilayered in itself and reflects the inner complexity of modern Korean society such as diversities in class, gender, and race. Second, South Korean popular culture is decidedly intermingled with the foreign as can be observed from the local indigenization of the Hollywood blockbuster. Third, through the processes of selective adaptation via transculturalization, South Korean popular culture becomes a hybrid that is not exclusively and purely "our own/Korean" nor absolutely "foreign/other." Fourth, the hybridity of South Korean popular culture is heterogeneous in ways that are different from the heterogeneity of other cultures and has diverse aspects due to a continuous transculturalization process.

Transculturality as *Mugukjeok*

The Korean word *mugukjeok* (무국적, 無國籍) means "lacking in or having no nationality." It shares the same Chinese characters as the Japanese word *mukokuseki*,

introduced by Iwabuchi in his book *Recentering Globalization* (2002a: 29). *Mugukjeok* is an example of transculturality. After *Shiri*'s success, South Korean film productions became more competitive by becoming more globalized, more amalgamated, and more non-nationalistic (*mugukjeok*); these *mugukjeok* films are different from earlier nationalistic South Korean films. Another example of *mugukjeok* can be seen in popular music, where artists such as Rain and Se7en are highly influenced by American R&B and hip-hop singers such as Usher and Justin Timberlake. When Rain performed his debut song, *Bad Guy*, at his concert in Madison Square Garden in February 2006, he replicated some of Usher's dance moves and some media in the US have pointed out that his style virtually clones that of American popular music (Walsh 2006). Undoubtedly, this has been instigated by JYP, Rain's producer, whose very first quote at the beginning of this chapter regarding his desire to achieve *Hallyu* without *Hal* (*Han*, Korea/nness) suggests that Rain has become that very embodiment. Rain and his regional success demonstrate the ways in which *mugukjeok* functions in the globalization and transculturation of South Korean popular music.

South Korean popular culture's *mugukjeok* is similar to Meyrowitz's idea of "no sense of place" (1985). Meyrowitz's definition highlights the influence of media flow that creates communities with "no sense of place" who share culturally neutral presentations. In order to explain the *mukoksaeki* of cultural commodities, Iwabuchi suggests the concept of "cultural odorlessness." He argues that culturally odorless products such as Pokémon, Nintendo, and the Sony Walkman tend to be characterized as racially and ethnically softened or as having had their identities erased (2002a). This culturally hybrid odorlessness can also be explained through Appadurai's concept of "mediascapes." Mediascapes refer to the capabilities of the media in producing and disseminating information as well as images through transcultural flows. He argues that the most important aspect of mediascapes is that they provide images and narratives to culturally diverse audiences (1996: 35). Mediascapes enable cultures to flow, mix, metamorphose, and become odorless. These practices create non-nationality or *mugukjeok*. *Mugukjeok* is the inspiration for the creation of "sodalities" between different cultural groups, which eventually stimulate active transcultural consumption. Appadurai further explains:

Part of what the mass media make possible, because of the conditions of collective reading, criticism, and pleasure, is what I have elsewhere called a "community of sentiment" (Appadurai 1990), a group that begins to imagine and feel things together ... Collective experiences of the mass media, especially film and video, can create sodalities of worship and charisma ... These mass-mediated sodalities have the additional complexity that, in them, diverse local experiences of taste, pleasure, and politics can crisscross with one another, thus creating the possibility of convergences in translocal social action that would otherwise be hard to imagine. (1996: 8)

This point can be summarized as: when one culture flows into another, there must always be interventions and metamorphosis, which emphasize the interaction between two different cultures and create commonalities that are conducive to transcultural consumption. Jan Nederveen Pieterse defines globalization in this way as an ongoing production of a "global mélange" through the hybridization process (2004: 43–44). The transcultural flow is, in short, a repetition of the processes of production, consumption, modification, and reproduction. In other words, cultures are deterritorialized and reterritorialized and contribute to the creation of diverse *mugukjeok* styles. Such a perspective is more productive than a nation-centric view of global cultural power. The theoretical framework of *mugukjeok* is critical to understanding the transcultural consumption of South Korean popular culture because this popular culture is received by diverse audiences located in such different places as Japan, Singapore, and the West.

Transculturality as Audience Reception

The transculturality of South Korean popular culture can also be examined using the theoretical framework of media audience reception studies. Pertti Alasuutari, in the introduction of the edited book, *Rethinking the Media Audience*, suggests that there are three generations of reception studies (1999: 1–21). The first generation of reception studies, characterized as reception research, employs a semiotic approach in analyzing the way that media messages are created and received. Stuart Hall's well-known concepts of "encoding and decoding" (1980) typifies reception research. Hall's semiotic approach sees communication as a process whereby certain messages are sent and then received with certain effects, where these effects depend on how audiences interpret media messages. Hall argues that all messages can be decoded differently by different audiences. This approach involves a shift from examining the effect of the impact of media messages on audiences to a focus on the interpretations of audiences (Alasuutari 1999: 2–4).

The second generation of reception studies refers to empirical reception studies and is characterized as the audience ethnography paradigm. While the first generation puts more emphasis on the interpretation of media texts and messages by particular audiences, the second generation focuses more on analyzing "interpretive communities" — the audiences (1999: 5). Alasuutari further argues that: people representing the second generation of reception studies like to emphasize that they are doing or that one should do proper ethnographic case studies of "interpretive communities." One even talks about an "ethnographic turn" quite comparable to the previous "linguistic turn." Like classic anthropologists such as Malinowski (1961), it has been argued that a proper ethnographic study in audience ethnography entails at least several months' stay in the "field" (Drottner 1992) — a demand which, strangely enough, is presented at a time when anthropologists and

qualitative sociologists are increasingly questioning the whole notion of a “field” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997).

The third generation of reception studies, according to Alsaunari, applies discursive or constructionist views to audience research. This generation “brings the media back to media studies, but conceives of the media and media messages in a broader sense than just as an encoded text and then decoded by a particular ‘interpretive community’” (1999: 7). The objective of the reception research of the third generation is to illustrate contemporary “media culture” and it mainly focuses on the role of the media in everyday life in the postmodern contemporary world. In particular, Ien Ang emphasizes that investigating media audiences in a postmodern world only becomes significant when such investigation points toward a broader critical understanding of the particularities of contemporary culture (1996: 4).

Ang’s point about the importance of focusing on cultural particularities is echoed by Sonia Livingstone, who observes that audience reception studies “focus on the interpretative relation between audience and medium, where this relation is understood within a broadly ethnographic context” (1998: 237). According to Livingstone, audience reception studies analyze the ways in which different ethnographic groups of viewers interpret media products in different ways based on their particular socio-political contexts. Such an approach describes the ways in which media products are interpreted and incorporated differently by various regional audiences because of their diverse local and specific cultural contexts (Robertson 1995; Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 1996). In line with the notion of third-generation reception studies, this book focuses on the differing practices of reception of South Korean popular culture by three different regional audiences — Japan, Singapore, the West — based on the cultural particularities of each region.

This book also emphasizes the fact that these regional audiences are “active” instead of “passive” audiences. As Wang et al. have argued, the image of contemporary audiences has changed “from [being seen as] passive, fragmented individuals manipulated by media to [being seen as] autonomous social groups which select and interpret program content according to their own interest and cultural background” (2000: 12). This notion of audiences as active can be extended with the concept of “participatory culture.” This concept emphasizes the significance of the roles of private individuals (the public) as consumers and, importantly, as contributors or producers; this combination of the roles of individuals as both consumers and producers is well-described by the term “prosumer.”¹⁷ Henry Jenkins argues that the “circulation of media content — across different media systems, competing media economies, and national borders — depends heavily on consumers’ active participation” (2006a: 3). Jenkins further argues that within participatory culture, audiences actively participate in media production, where the boundaries between producer and consumer, sender and receiver, and corporate media and grassroots have now blurred (2006a: 1–24). Such participatory culture can be detected from

many online websites such as Rain’s Singaporean fan club website, RainSingapore.com; the film review website, Twitch.net; and the video-sharing website, YouTube.com. In these online websites, South Korean popular culture is dynamically circulated, reproduced, and consumed by active global audiences. It is evident that, empowered by new media technologies, audiences have now become transcultural prosumers. Based on the discursive view of third-generation reception studies, this book focuses on two main aspects of the transcultural consumption of South Korean popular culture: the particularity of cultural context of each region, and the active and participatory aspects of audiences.

Transculturality as Consumption

According to Chua Beng Huat, “consumption is to be treated as a process by which artefacts are not simply bought and consumed, but given meaning through their active incorporation in people’s lives. The innovative ways of using undistinguished mass-production goods are conceptualized as ‘styles’ which are expressive of the individualities/identities of the users” (2000: 5). Chua argues that Asia has arisen as a new consuming market during the last couple of decades despite the 1997 economic crisis that temporarily hindered economic growth. He stresses that the tendency of Asian consumer groups is to be attracted to the American lifestyle and to American ideologies such as liberal values and individualism. Chua also points out that Asia is not only the market for American products, but also for Japanese consumer goods such as cars, television sets, and other electronic products. He explains that Japanese technological “superiority” is recognized among Asian countries. In addition to technological and industrial superiority, Iwabuchi’s point of view stresses the influential power of Japanese cultural products and the Japanese lifestyle in many Asian countries.

Iwabuchi argues that Asians, especially the young, desire Japanese technology, the Japanese lifestyle, and Japanese popular culture. He observes that Asian consumers have, since the 1980s, fallen in love with Japanese cultural products such as popular music, television dramas, and computer games. He points out that their popularity in the Asian region is due to the “similar but superior” aspects of Japanese products (2001: 204; 2002a: 8). He argues that “young people in Taiwan or Hong Kong actually perceive the sense of cultural similarity or proximity in positive ways in consuming Japanese popular cultural forms” (2001: 205). This sense of cultural proximity is produced in consumers through the cultural odorlessness of these products. According to Iwabuchi, the urban middle-class culture that is widely apparent across Asia, including Japan, is proof of an odorless culture which can be comprehended in the concept of “sharing Asianness.” This “emerging Asianness” is primarily articulated in the shared pursuit of urban consumption of Americanized (Westernized) popular culture” (2001: 206). The indigenization of modern Western

culture and the sharing of cultural proximity have become driving forces of creating Asianness, and the combination of these forces enables cultural products to travel across the various Asian countries. Iwabuchi describes the significant point of transcultural flows in the Asian region:

With the emergence of Asian capitalist sphere in which Japanese popular culture finds wider audiences, Japan's exploitative articulation of Asian cultural commonality has been reframed to accommodate itself to the disjunctive transnational flows of capital, cultural products and imagination. Transnational popular cultural flows highlight the fact that it has become no longer tenable for Japan to contain its cultural orientation and agendas within clearly demarcated national boundaries. (2001: 202)

Iwabuchi argues that there is a commonality between Asian countries where they share certain historical aspects such as the process of indigenization of Western modern civilization. This commonality has become strengthened through various transcultural flows. Thus, the sharing of a commonality of Asianness allows culture to travel more easily in the Asian region.

Another scholar, Leo Ching, has also detected the sharing of a sense of Asianness in the region. In his article "Globalizing the Regional, Regionalizing the Global," Ching discusses the relationship between Japanese mass culture and Asianism. According to him, despite the extraordinary economic growth in Asia, there is no corresponding extension of Asian culture on a global scale. However, Japanese mass culture such as popular music and television dramas has achieved massive popularity in the Asian region. In order to examine the possible reasons for this, he focuses on the relationship between mass culture and regional identity — here, regional identity relates to an imagined regional community — and examines two examples: the Japanese morning drama, *Oshin*, and the children's animated series, *Doraemon*. Ching states:

The tremendous popularity in Asia of both programs has been attributed to a certain commonality, a certain structure of feeling that has rearticulated something that is invariably "Japanese" (as far as the site of production and the manifested cultural codes are concerned) into something that one might call an "Asian consciousness" or "Asiatic imaginary." This culturalist regionalism sets itself against the background of a specific regional economic development under late capitalism. (2000: 249)

According to him, the success of Japanese popular culture is explained by two reasons. First, in spite of the uniqueness and heterogeneity of the different countries in Asia, there is an association or identification as Asian that is common to these countries. Second, despite their specific articulations of Asianness, there is a regional

recognition of Japan as a forerunner in the region and as a developmental leader of social and economic progress. Hence, in relation to Japan, the other Asian countries are "alike, but not quite." In short, the popularity of Japanese popular culture in the region can be explained by a concept of shared Asianness with the region and the assumed cultural superiority of Japan. Ching points out that "various notions of 'Asianness' have been constructed through this media regionalism," such as MTV (2000: 256). Hence, transcultural media flows generate the sense of shared Asianness and it is this sense of cultural proximity between Asian countries that stimulates the travel of cultures across boundaries.

Another scholar who has examined these transcultural phenomena is Ding-Tzann Lii who, in her article "A Colonized Empire," discusses how Hong Kong films are a dominant cultural form in relation to the film industries of other Asian countries (1998). Lii argues that the "Hong Kong film industry not only resists foreign domination, but also 'invades' other countries, thereby creating a new type of imperialism." She names this "marginal imperialism." Lii explains:

Hong Kong is a colony situated at the periphery of the world power system. However, the colony is becoming imperialist and is establishing itself as an empire. What are the implications of the new kind of imperialism associated with the colonized empire? To begin with, Hong Kong imperialism is new in the sense that it is different from the old one, which is created by the Western core (including Japan), and is therefore referred to here as "core imperialism." In contrast, the imperialism as exemplified by Hong Kong movies emerges at the margin of the world system, and occurs primarily within third-world countries. This is why I refer to it as "marginal imperialism." (1998: 125)

Lii argues that the form of marginal imperialism articulated by Hong Kong cinema is different from the original imperialism emanating from the Western core. She argues that in this original imperialistic system, subordinated others are transformed or even erased. However, in the system of marginal imperialism, a process of "yielding" has occurred where "the self" enters into and interacts with "the others." This process creates a new synthesized form with a higher order than the original forms. This concept of "yielding" can be elucidated as the process of indigenization in localization theory. What Lii highlights here is that media from the periphery, such as Hong Kong cinema, can operate to regionalize, to localize (Asianize), and finally, to imperialize the region. Lii maintains that "marginal imperialism has created a yielding mode of articulation, which is different from the incorporating mode of articulation associated with core powers" (1998: 136). The regional popularity of Hong Kong cinema can be explained by the process of localization, which has enabled Hong Kong cinema to become a regionally dominant culture.

The above scholarly approaches can be applied to examining the transcultural influence of South Korean popular culture. For example, in relation to Iwabuchi's and Ching's arguments on the regional popularity of Japanese popular culture, the current popularity of South Korean popular culture can be understood as "similar but superior" to other Asian cultures. The characteristic of "similar" can be explained through Iwabuchi's concept of the "Japanization" trend in the world cultural market, where he stresses Japan's dominant influence within the Asian region, including South Korea. It is evident that South Korean popular culture has been influenced by Japanese popular culture through the Japanization process and has become "similar," in other words, *mugukjeok*. This *mugukjeok* South Korean cultural product indeed reinvigorates the sense of sharing Asianness which allows the products to travel more easily in Japan and other Asian countries.

In addition, the "superiority" of South Korean popular culture can be identified through the notion of "sufficiency" which is characterized by the various aspects of its hybridity. Li's point of "marginal imperialism" also supports the notion of the superiority of hybridized South Korean popular culture, as she argues that one culture interacts with another and this creates a new synthesized form with a higher order than the original ones (1998: 128). A good example of foreign embracing of "similar but superior" (sufficient) Korean popular culture can be found in the reviews of *Taegukgi* by US film critics. Many critics and reviewers mention that the film shares similarities with *Saving Private Ryan* due to its hyper-realistic depiction of explosions, flying limbs, and bodily mutilation in the combat scenes; at the same time, many of them also point out that the film's powerful narrative of the anguish and grief that are experienced by the two separated brothers who have to point their guns at each other enhances the spectacularized tension of the battle sequences to the point where the tension of these sequences surpasses that of the battle sequences in Hollywood blockbusters (Cornelius 2005; Villarreal 2004; Savlov 2004; Slotek 2004; Kehr 2004). This is a good example of the ways in which contemporary South Korean popular culture has the characteristic of being "similar" as it adapts globally well-known popular cultural elements, and at the same time, has the characteristic of being "superior" as it is hybridized and indigenized during which it creates synthesized forms of a higher order (sufficiency). New hybrid South Korean masculinity can be the best example to explain similar but superior South Korean popular culture.

Hybridity of Korean Masculinity

Korean Masculinity Discourses

In Michel Foucault's book, *History of Sexuality*, sexuality is seen as being constituted by a historical apparatus. He writes: "sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of

natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge gradually tries to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct" (1979: 152). If sexuality is subject to socio-historical constructions, as Foucault has suggested, then the essentialist notion of masculinity as being biologically determined should also be questioned. Such a questioning of the essentialist notion of gender has been launched by Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity. In her article, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," Butler writes:

Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time — an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (1988: 519)

Here, Butler argues that sexuality and gender are culturally constructed through the repetition of stylized performances of gender in time. These stylized bodily performances, in their repetition, establish the appearance of an essential and naturally given gender.

Similarly, R. W. Connell suggests the concept of "doing masculinities" in order to explain culturally constructed masculinity. He argues that "different cultures, and different periods of history construct masculinity differently ... masculinities do not exist prior to social behavior, either as bodily states or fixed personalities. Rather, masculinities come into existence as people act. They are accomplished in everyday conduct or organizational life, as patterns of social practice" (2000b). Masculinity is produced and maintained through culturally specific and repetitive everyday practices, where such practices as those of acting, dressing, or speaking are performed in particular gender-specific ways (Connell 1995: 6, 35, 80). Thus, the above conceptualizations of sexuality and masculinity underscore three points: one, that masculinity is constructed and reconstructed regularly; two, that masculinity is fluid and may be constructed differently in different situations and different cultural contexts; three, that multiple masculinities are produced at any given historical moment. Drawing on Connell's concept of masculinity as multiple and heterogeneous, this section discusses the ways in which South Korean masculinities have been deconstructed and hybridized in relation to South Korea's particular socio-political context and transcultural dynamics.

Moon Seung-Sook uses the term "hegemonic masculinity" to refer to the dominant practices of masculinity within the South Korean local context of Confucian tradition, militarization, and compressed industrialization. In her article, "The Production and Subversion of Hegemonic Masculinity," Moon addresses three components that constitute hegemonic masculinity in the particular context of South

Korea. These three components are: the ability to provide for the family, masculine distance from daily reproductive labor, and military service (2002: 79–113). In this section, drawing on Moon's schematic description of hegemonic masculinity, I discuss three major stereotypical images of South Korean masculinities: patriarchal authoritarian, *seonbi* (*wen*), and violent.

Firstly, South Korean hegemonic masculinity embodies patriarchal authoritarianism where men were traditionally considered to be heads of family and the main providers. Historically, the *yungban* (the aristocracy during the Joseon dynasty) households relegated women to interior spaces while men's domains were exterior spaces, such as a scholar's studio (Moon 2002: 84). This spatial division was based on Confucian patriarchal ideology and created a gendered division of labor. Hence, men were expected to work outside the home while women became domestic housewives. As Confucian patriarchy later transformed into modern industrialized patriarchy, the normative gender constructs of the male-as-provider and the female-as-dependent-housewife persisted. In the realm of capitalist industrialization, men's ability to provide for the family becomes the material basis of men's authority as fathers and husbands. Moon explains that the ideas and practices that define men as the principal income-earners of the family validate men's domestic authority and dominance in South Korea so that men's earning power becomes a primary indicator of their manliness (2002: 84–86).

Moon's argument that South Korea's patriarchal authoritarianism was reinforced by capitalist industrialization is supported by Kim Eun-Shil, who addresses the relationship between patriarchal authoritarianism and the economic development model during the modernization era in South Korea in her article, "Cultural Logic and Patriarchy in the Korean Modernization Project" (2000: 105–30). She argues that during the modernization era, South Korea built a new value structure based on gendered binaries such as masculine/feminine, material/spiritual, modern/traditional, and Western/Eastern. Kim observes that South Korea's modernization is often considered as a process of production, rationalization, and control which is often perceived as belonging to the masculine realm. She further states that South Korean modernization is based on "dynamic achievement and development, desires for infinite growth ... and the individual male's desire for modernization and male solidarity" (2000: 117). Such dynamic modernization of the Westernized and production-driven industrial structure in South Korea is initiated and controlled by men because of traditional patriarchy (2000: 118). Such industrialization endows South Korean men with authoritarian power while neglecting South Korean women's productive ability and relegating them to the domestic and subordinate realm. In other words, while undergoing modern industrialization, the patriarchal system allows South Korean men to be controlling subjects as masculinity is associated with development and industrial production while South Korean women either become passive tools or men's subordinates. South Korean authoritarian

masculinity is constructed and enabled by South Korea's particular socio-economic context, which is a blend of the traditional patriarchal system and production-driven industrialization.

Secondly, Moon Seung-Sook argues that the separation of men from the daily work of reproductive and caring labor is another element of hegemonic masculinity. This separation is demanded by the role of men as family providers. Because men are required by society to leave the domestic space and earn income while women are required to perform various domestic chores such as cleaning, washing, and caring for children, performing any of these domestic activities is considered unmanly or emasculating (2002: 99). In order to explain the link between masculinity and the required distance from reproductive labor, Moon suggests analyzing the model of *seonbi* masculinity during the Joseon dynasty (1392–1910). *Seonbi* is a term that refers to a Confucian scholar-official who studies Confucian texts to obtain "wisdom" (*wen*, 文, 文). During this period of study, the *seonbi* is not supposed to degrade himself by engaging in any form of manual labor or any economic activity (2002: 99). *Seonbi* masculinity thus indicates mental attainment rather than physical performance. Such a notion of *seonbi* masculinity contributes to men's disengagement from the daily domestic labor which is indispensable for the maintenance of society but devalued and mostly performed by women. Despite its sexist aspects, *seonbi* masculinity is still considered to be an ideal model of Korean masculinity by some scholars because it also represents such traditional virtues as politeness, integrity, faithfulness, loyalty, and cultural-scholarly attainment (Geum 2000: 59–92).

Geum's explanation of the cultural-scholarly attainment aspect of *seonbi* masculinity is supported by Kam Louie's theory of "Chinese *wen* masculinity" (2002). Louie argues that the paradigm of the "binary opposition between *wen* (文), the mental or civil, and *wu* (武), the physical or martial" is important in Chinese conceptions of masculinity but not as evident in contemporary Western conceptions of maleness (2002: 10). Although an ideal man would be expected to embody a balance between *wen* and *wu*, historically, *wen* tended to be considered superior to *wu*. Because Confucius is the god of *wen*, in China, which was a strict Confucian country at one time, *wen* — mental attainment — was often considered to be a more elite masculine form than *wu* — physical attainment (2002: 17–18). Elite Chinese *wen* masculinity has influenced Korea's *seonbi* masculinity because Korea has, historically, been culturally influenced by the Chinese Confucian tradition. It could be pointed out that the notion of *seonbi* masculinity — mental and cultural attainment — is in contrast to the hegemonic masculinity of contemporary South Korea where men are involved with physical work and with business activities as family providers. This contradiction can be explained by the fact that South Korean masculinities are multiple and heterogeneous. In contemporary times, many South Koreans still value *seonbi* masculinity as constituting one of the noble masculinities; this is evident from the domestic popularity of male stars in recent television

dramas and movies such as BYJ in *Winter Sonata* and Han Seok-Gyu in *Christmas in August* (*Dalwol-ui Keurisseumnaseu* 1998), in which the male characters embody *seonbi* masculinity. Because it emphasizes gentle and cultured mentality, not strong physical achievement, *seonbi* masculinity has contributed to the construction of soft South Korean masculinity.

Thirdly, Moon Seung-Sook also argues that mandatory military service constitutes another element of hegemonic masculinity within the context of the ongoing military confrontation between North and South Korea (2002: 89).¹⁸ Historically, the military has been the exclusive province of men. In Korea, particularly due to the peculiar political condition of a national split between North and South, military service subjects men to extreme physical hardship and discipline within a strict hierarchical system. Several kinds of abuse, including cases that have led to suicide or murder, are reported every year. On June 19, 2005, a twenty-two-year-old army private killed eight soldiers and wounded four in a grenade and shooting rampage along the DMZ. He later said that this was in retaliation against fellow soldiers who had bullied and abused him (Hwang 2005). Cho Seong-Sook explains that the military service induces routinization and the justification of violence because soldiers are allowed to legally practice violence, which is the means by which they learn the logic of conquest (1997: 168–69). Lee Hyo-Je, the president of the Association of Women's Organizations, states that "violence is widespread in South Korea because militarism justifies violence" (2002). Kim Jeong-Soo also points out that militarism evokes "authoritarianism, violence, homogenization, and blind obedience" (2001).

Many South Korean scholars have insisted on the socio-political connections between violent South Korean masculinity and militarism. In *The Republic of Korea of Yours*, Park No-Ja argues that Korean militarism, particularly the military service, drives the society violent and dehumanizes Korean men (2001: 97–119). He further suggests that the military system creates human robots that commit violence without feeling their conscience (2001: 108–9). Another scholar, Kim Kyung-Hyun, also suggests that the military dictatorships of the past were responsible for violent Korean masculinity. In his book, *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema*, he argues that violent masculinity that has been portrayed in South Korean films is the effect of the political, economic, and cultural implications of the harsh rule of military dictators from the 1960s to the 1980s. He states, "Throughout the early 1980s, the films that featured the transformation of aimless and anxious men undergoing the process of maturity through violent, introspective searches were ubiquitous" (2004: 5). Thus, it is evident that such a political environment and social system have created frustration and anxiety in South Korean men and that their rage against the military dictatorial government can only be explored through violent acts. Violent South Korean masculinity is constructed due to Korea's specific political condition of national division and militarism.

Through discussing the three representative features of South Korean hegemonic masculinity — patriarchal authoritarian masculinity, *seonbi* masculinity, and violent masculinity — I have examined how Korea's specific socio-political contexts have helped to create heterogeneous and contradictory masculinities. Since the early 1990s, various socio-political events have deconstructed these hegemonic masculinities. For example, the IMF catastrophe has caused a crisis in terms of the traditional roles of men as primary household income-earners.

An attempt at the deconstruction of South Korean masculinity is evident from Min-Ki, the male protagonist of the melodrama, *Happy End* (1999). Kim Kyung-Hyun suggests that Min-Ki transgresses the normative boundaries of gender by performing various household chores in the kitchen and by watching television dramas with keen interest (2004: 254–58). He argues that the connection between domesticity, as represented by the kitchen and daytime soaps, and masculinity, as represented by the jobless and middle-aged Min-Ki, demonstrates the deconstruction of conventional gender roles. This is a perfect example of the deconstruction of the paradigm of *seonbi* masculinity where men are expected to remain separated from daily domestic labor. However, Min-Ki only demonstrates the incomplete deconstruction of South Korean masculinity. Kim Kyung-Hyun notes that, by having Min-Ki kill his unfaithful wife, Bora, the film ultimately carries the message that "the man must resort to violence in order to recover himself from trauma" (2004: 258). It is evident that Min-Ki reverts back to violent masculinity after the attempt at deconstructing hegemonic masculinity. Despite his attempt to deconstruct hegemonic masculinity through subverting gender roles, Min-Ki, by killing Bora, fails to complete the deconstruction of hegemonic authoritarian South Korean masculinity.

In his article, "The Gaze of the Consuming Subject: Construction of Masculinity," Cho Heup argues that *Happy End* contains the theme of the crisis of patriarchal hegemony. This is because Bora's adultery and her whoring body are "provoking texts which are against the traditional patriarchal system" (2004: 134). He also points out how the film shows that "the only way of recuperating patriarchal ideology is through violence" and that Min-Ki still fits into an image of a traditional patriarchal violent man (2004: 134). However, Cho points to the other male character in the film, Il-Beom — Bora's lover — as exemplifying the deconstruction of South Korean hegemonic masculinity. Cho argues that Il-Beom represents soft masculinity through his caring and gentle image. Referring to further examples like Sang-Woo in *One Fine Spring Day* (*Bonnareun Ganda* 2001) and In-Woo in *Bungee Jumping of Their Own* (*Bonjijjempweul Hida* 2001), Cho argues that there is a new tendency towards representing soft and neutral masculinity in South Korean films in recent years. These soft male characters are good examples of how South Korean masculinity has been transformed. This transformation demonstrates that South Korean men are now "doing" different masculine acts in terms of the different

socio-cultural contexts of recent South Korea. The central process enabling the doing, or performance, of different masculinities is, I argue, transculturation.

The Soft Masculinity of Bae Yong-Joon: *Mugukjeok* and Postcolonialism

In chapter 2, I focus on Japanese fandom of Bae Yong-Joon (BYJ) and examine the ways in which South Korean masculinity is reconstructed through the ambivalent desires of middle-aged Japanese female fans. These desires are evident in the mixed cultural practice of postcolonial *mugukjeok*; via this practice, the fans create new South Korean soft masculinity. First, *mugukjeok* is an example of the cultural proximity that is created through transcultural flows between South Korea and Japan.¹⁹ In terms of masculinity, *mugukjeok* is evident from the ways in which the two countries commonly produce and consume pretty boy (*keomniman*) images which possibly originate from the *bishōnen* of Japanese *shōjo manga*. This *bishōnen* image has repeatedly appeared in pastiches and been commodified by various regional pop-stars, in the course of which this image has evolved to eventually create the “shared imagination” of pan-East Asian soft masculinity.

Second, BYJ’s *wen* masculine image, in relation to the nostalgic “shared imagination” of Confucian tradition, also embodies *mugukjeok* soft masculinity. Here, postcolonialism is evident from the “retrospective” and “nostalgic” ways in which Japanese fans embrace the *wen* masculine image of BYJ. This can be related back to the colonial experience between Korea and Japan. In brief, the Japanese embrace of BYJ, particularly his *wen* masculinity, can be explained as a kind of consumption of the simulacrum of Japan’s past; in other words, the Japanese embrace of BYJ is the result of the commodification of memory. Thus, the chapter demonstrates how the soft masculinity of BYJ is constructed based on the disjunctive cultural practice of “counter-coevality” (caused by temporal lag) and “cultural proximity” (due to spatial adjacency).

Chapter 2 is based on audience reception research conducted in Japan in August and September 2005. I interviewed a total of eighteen of BYJ’s female fans from Tokyo and Okinawa, and divided them into four focus groups that had five, four, seven, and two participants respectively. Seven of the participants were in their thirties, three were in their forties, six were in their fifties, and two were in their sixties. I also collected fifty-six questionnaires at the *Saitama Super Arena*, where the promotional event for BYJ’s film, *April Snow*, was held on August 31, 2005.

The Global Masculinity of Rain: *Mugukjeok* and Regional Pop-Consumerism

Chapter 3 focuses on the ways in which South Korean masculinity is reconstructed through the global desires of Rain’s Singaporean female fans. This reconstruction is

evident in the mixed cultural practices between *mugukjeok* and pop-consumerism in Asia, during which new South Korean global masculinity is created and transculturally consumed. First, *mugukjeok* is evident from the pragmatic ways in which Rain is globalized where his masculinity becomes non-nationalized due to the hybridization of Confucian traditional masculinity with a type of global masculinity that is mainly exemplified by the figure of the “cute” (Japanese *kawaii*) boy and by such American stars as Justin Timberlake and Usher. Rain’s hybridized global masculinity demonstrates how South Korea’s popular cultural products relentlessly adapt global popular cultural elements in pragmatic ways and combine them with traditional masculine images to appeal to the complex desires of transcultural viewers.

Second, regional pop-consumerism is another driving force behind the reconstruction of Rain’s hybrid global masculinity. This regional pop-consumerism can be connected to the consumerist lifestyle of the “new rich” in Asia. The new rich in Asia can be characterized as a new middle-class in some Asian countries, based on their economic power as a new consumer group. Chua Beng Huat explains that, with the expanding desires of the new rich, a new lifestyle of consumerism has emerged in Asia (2000: 3). In Singapore, this new consumerist lifestyle is complicated because the Westernized values and commodities that come with this new lifestyle clash with the different traditional ways of life that co-exist in Singapore’s multicultural society (2003: 20). Rain’s Singaporean fans, who constitute a good example of the new rich in Asia, perform complex consumption practices that characterize their global lifestyles. It is these consumption practices that constitute the trans-pop-consumerism of Singaporean fans in relation to Rain’s hybrid global masculinity.²⁰

Chapter 3 is based on focus group interviews, survey questionnaires, and participant observation of an official fan club website, RainSingapore.com. In December 2005, and July and August of 2006, I interviewed five members of Rain’s Singaporean fan club. One is in her twenties, three are in their thirties, and one is over fifty. Four of them are Singaporean-born working women of Chinese (Mandarin-speaking) ethnic backgrounds and the other is a Malaysian-born Chinese who has been living in Singapore for more than fifteen years. One is married and four are single.

The Postmodern Masculinity in *Oldboy*: *Mugukjeok* and Neo-Orientalism

Chapter 4 focuses on Western cult fandom of the Korean genre film, *Oldboy*, and discusses how postmodern South Korean masculinity is reconstructed through the ambivalent desires of Western spectators based on the mixed practice of *mugukjeok* and neo-Orientalism. This chapter examines how the Western desire

for the Other is expressed, transformed, and redefined by consuming hybrid South Korean masculinity, as exemplified by the “savage but cool” Dae-Soo, and how this transformed desire, “with a distinctly postmodern slant,” is different from earlier Orientalist desires towards the primitive Other. This Western desire is ambivalent because it seeks the strangeness of Otherness and, at the same time, the familiarity of modern “coolness.” Hence, Western audiences of *Oldboy* experience the hybrid “time between dog and wolf,” which refers to the time when they cannot identify whether Dae-Soo is a “cool” friend or a savage stranger.²¹ This “time between dog and wolf” epitomizes the current ever-fluctuating postmodern era, an era characterized by “the demise of the tradition of Aristotelian logic, through which Western society has long defined itself via a series of polar oppositions, the central of which were Good versus Evil, and Us versus Them” (Booker 2007: xv); this is the time when Western audiences ambivalently embrace postmodern South Korean masculinity that is fragmented and constantly transforming.

Chapter 4 is based on the empirical research on the online cult fandom of *Oldboy* in various film review websites. In order to discuss the online fandom of this film, I examine reviews and comments on forums and discussion boards of film review websites such as IMDb.com, RottenTomatoes.com, AinItCool.com, BeyondHollywood.com, and TwitchFilm.net. In addition to online participant observation, I conducted one focus group interview with three male fans of *Oldboy* in their twenties and two individual interviews with two male fans of *Oldboy*, both of whom are in their thirties. These interviews were conducted between November 2004 and September 2007 in Melbourne. From participant observation on the film review websites and through the interviews, I discovered that the majority of the fans of *Oldboy* were males in their twenties and thirties. Hence, the gender dynamics between the audience and South Korean masculinity in this chapter appear to be different from those dynamics between the female fans and the male South Korean stars that are analyzed in chapter 2 and 3. Thus, in chapter 4, I focus on the West’s ambivalent reception of *Oldboy*, where this reception fluctuates between Western male identification with South Korean cool masculinity and Western desire for the primitiveness of South Korean masculinity.

I use “Euro-American” interchangeably with the term “Western” in this chapter, because the West is conventionally defined as Europe and its direct colonial offshoots such as the US and Australia, while the East, in many instances, simply denotes “Asia.” As Guillermo Gómez-Peña clearly points out in his article “The New Global Culture,” binary models of understanding the world are no longer functional due to digital technology and global communication (2001: 7). However, in discussing the neo-Orientalist Western reception of South Korean genre films, I want to examine how Orientalism still persists and

functions even in this ever-fluctuating postmodern global era, where advanced technology blurs the boundaries between such binary oppositions as local and global, Us and Them, East and West. I chose the term “the West” to refer to the websites and their users after spending considerable time participating in and observing these websites.²² The term embraces the origins and backgrounds of websites where most users are English-speaking Euro-Americans.