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Transnational Intimacies:

Korean Television Dramas, Romance, Erotics, and Race

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Gender Studies

by

Min Joo Lee

2020

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Transnational Intimacies:

Korean Television Dramas, Romance, Erotics, and Race

by

Min Joo Lee

Doctor of Philosophy in Gender Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor Purnima Mankekar, Chair

In this dissertation, I examine the gendered and racial politics of women's transnational sex tourism. I draw on thirteen months of ethnographic fieldwork with women from Europe and North America who travel to South Korea to form intimate relations with South Korean men in a phenomenon known as *Hallyu* tourism. *Hallyu* (also known as the Korean Wave) is a transnational phenomenon whereby people from all over the world consume South Korean popular culture including music, films, and television programs. In my dissertation, I focus on the transnational popularity of romantic South Korean television dramas and how they generate erotic desires in their viewers for South Korean men. I build on interdisciplinary debates in the fields of Gender Studies, Asian Studies, and Media Studies to examine the racial, gendered, and sexual politics of the *Hallyu* tourists' erotic desires and their intimate relationships with South Korea men. I argue that these transnational relationships of intimacy produce racialized

discourses of South Korean masculinity emerging at the intersection of South Korean cultural conceptions of gender and transnational discourses of race. Furthermore, I suggest that these intimate encounters between South Korean men and "Western" female *Hallyu* tourists compel us to reconfigure binary conceptions of West versus East, national versus transnational, sex versus romance, and masculine versus feminine. By analyzing why and how the *Hallyu* tourists use South Korean television dramas to racially eroticize South Korean men, I demonstrate the inextricability of erotics from race and gender.

The dissertation of Min Joo Lee is approved.

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2020

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Beginning in the early twenty-first century, Korean television dramas gained transnational popularity. This phenomenon, called Hallyu, has many components ranging from Korean television dramas, K-pop, K-entertainment to Korean beauty products, fashion, language, and food. Reports by the Korean Trade Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA 2017) suggest that the direct and indirect profits from Hallyu make it one of the fastest-growing industries in Korea. As a case in point, the Korean romance drama *Descendants of the Sun* (2016) was exported to 27 countries, including China, France, Romania, Sweden, Spain, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Myanmar, Cambodia, and the US. The Korean Creative Content Agency (KOCCA 2014) estimates that more than 18 million US viewers regularly stream these dramas on their digital devices. According to the report, these viewers devote as much as ten hours a week to watching Korean television dramas online.

Not only do the Hallyu fans stream the dramas, but some of them also invest an extensive amount of time and money to physically travel to Korea in a practice called Hallyu tourism. Approximately 12 million Hallyu tourists visit Korea each year, spurred by their love of Korean popular culture (Korea Tourism Organization 2013). 81% of Hallyu fans are not ethnically Korean (KOCCA 2014). Instead, a majority of them are primarily non-Korean Asian or white women in their teens or twenties (KOCCA 2014). This data indicates that Korean television dramas have grown from a national pastime maligned as "low-brow nonsense" to become the bedrock of the Korean economy and "soft power." Here, soft power refers to the country's ability to attract foreigners and global capital through positive images associated with the country (Nye

Jr 2008). Hallyu has enhanced Korean soft power in ways that facilitate the consumption of Korean popular culture by millions of people around the world.

Among the many components of Hallyu, I focus primarily on Korean television dramas because they complicate the supposed binary between fantasy and reality. My field research, as well as research conducted by other scholars, shows that K-pop fandom is primarily based on the idolization of the celebrities (Liew 2013). K-pop fans go to concerts and fan meetings to be in the presence of their favorite idols (Kim, Mayasari, and Oh 2013); they memorize Korean lyrics so they can sing along to the music; and sometimes they "cover-dance" to the music videos by emulating the dance moves of the idols (Liew 2013). Their fandom primarily revolves around their idolization of the K-pop stars. On the other hand, celebrities are only a part of the reason for Korean television dramas' transnational popularity. I suggest that the *emotions* portrayed and invoked by the television dramas are the key to their success: the melodramas and heart-pounding romantic comedies make viewers imagine and fantasize about Korea to the point that they travel to Korea to engage in intimate relationships with Korean men.

Although previous scholarship on Hallyu primarily focused on fans and tourists from other Asian countries, Hallyu tourists come from all over the world (Park 2014, Takeda 2014, Iwabuchi 2013). Since Hallyu is often studied as an inter-Asian phenomenon, its influence on fans outside Asia has not been as thoroughly analyzed. I conducted ethnographic field research from 2017 to 2018 with heterosexual, white, female Hallyu tourists in their late teens to early twenties from Australia, Denmark, France, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Russia, Canada, and the US who traveled to South Korea to forge intimate relations with Korean men. It is not my intention to argue that the Hallyu fans from this vast array of nations and cultures all interpret Korean dramas in the same way or desire Korean men in a monolithic manner. After all, as Ien

Ang (1996) points out, transnationality does not lead to homogeneity; transnational media merely work to facilitate the interconnections of cultures. Instead, I ask, what is it about Korean television dramas' depiction of romance and masculinity that cuts across various cultural backgrounds of these tourists to move them to seek intimacy with Korean men in their "real life"?

My research is positioned in relation to interdisciplinary and feminist debates on transnationalism including transnational travel, media, and fandom. My work engages with theories on spreadable media (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013, Curtin 2003) as well as transnational media (Chalaby 2005, Mankekar 2015). In conversation with these bodies of scholarship, I analyze how Korean television dramas, as transnational media, "travel" to different parts of the world and, in turn, how they facilitate the travel of fans who want to make their romantic fantasies come true. I build on the definition of fandom as "meaningful engagement and balancing of conflicting forces between self, fantasy and culture" (Sandvoss 2005, 78), to examine how, and why, fans of Korean television dramas from all over the world travel to Korea in what can be categorized as a mixture of romance tourism and fan tourism. Existing research on fan tourism primarily examines why fans-turned-tourists feel attached to particular places they saw on television and how they engage with those places when they visit those locales (Couldry 2005, Iwashita 2008). My research expands these analyses of fan tourism to examine how fans of Korean television dramas travel to Korea because of their attachment to mediated images of Korean men in melodramatic Korean television dramas which, many of them claimed to me, were true reflections of Korean men in "real life."

Melodrama

I characterize a majority of Hallyu dramas as melodramas. What is melodrama? Why is it significant to Hallyu? Jonathan Goldberg (2016) defines the etymology of the word as "*melos* + drama"; here, "*melos*" refers to the musical/melodic while "drama" refers to an "impossible plot situation" (155). According to Goldberg, this etymology derives from musical theater where melodramas are thought to have been conceived. In musical theater, melodrama refers to entertainment where "spoken words are underscored, interrupted, punctuated by music that plays beneath, alongside the dialogue, music that offers itself in no necessary or predictable harmonic sequence" (Goldberg 2016, 156). Since its inception in musical theater, many other forms of entertainment have incorporated narrative techniques of melodrama.

Melodrama may thus be found in many forms of entertainment ranging from opera, theater, films, to television. The portability and adaptability of melodrama speak to the genre's compatibility with diverse forms of entertainment. It also highlights how melodramas are not just "entertainment genres" but modes of storytelling that extend beyond the boundaries and structures of genres. At the same time, melodramatic styles differ from one entertainment format to another. For example, according to Marcie Frank (2013), in theater, melodramas refer to a multi-media genre of entertainment that mixes music, dance, and pantomime with acting. As Frank argues, aspects of theatrical performance that were formerly kept separate from the main stage are brought into the spotlight in the melodramatic theater to amplify the theatrical effects. In film, melodrama refers to various forms of *narrative* films ranging from silent films to so-called women's genre films (Goldberg 2016).

Although each entertainment form has specific stylistic variations in the ways they incorporate melodrama, they are similar in one sense: in all these variations, melodrama is a concept that refers to entertainments pivoting around emotionality. More specifically, in popular

culture, it tends to refer to emotions derived from “insignificant” situations: “The tears produced by the woman's film or soap opera, on the other hand, are considered unjustified by their trivial domestic or personal content and explainable only in terms of a “feminized sensibility” (Gledhill 1992, 106). Since melodramas are defined as “women’s genres,” melodramatic entertainment is popularly assumed to only portray “feminine issues” such as domestic and “trivial” personal travails.

Interlinked with the trivialization of melodramatic content and narrative technique is an equal dismissal or pathologizing of the emotions that they portray and induce in their viewers. During my field research, I interviewed multiple men (both Korean and non-Korean) who expressed incredulity at Korean melodramas and the Hallyu fans/tourists. These men pitted emotionality against logic to argue that melodramas and their viewers are illogical (Chapters 4, 6). According to Linda Williams (1991), melodramas are characterized by stylistic and emotional excess that is contrasted to a more “realistic, goal-oriented narrative” (3). In this sense, melodramas are deemed unrealistic and illogical entertainment with static narratives. Gledhill (1992) argues that in soap operas, conversations and dialogues often act as substitutes for action; the characters expound in lieu of actions. These narrative and visual styles of soap operas lend themselves to the criticism that they are formless narratives that lack progression. According to Gledhill, melodramas also rely on dialogue, albeit to a lesser extent than soap operas.

In the analysis that follows, I extend Gledhill’s analysis of the melodramatic style. While Gledhill focuses on dialogue as an important factor in melodramatic plots, I argue that emotionality, rather than dialogue, is the key component that induces melodramatic pleasure in Korean dramas. For example, as my research shows, many Hallyu fans who do not understand the Korean language watch Korean television dramas without subtitles and insist that they

enjoyed the shows despite not understanding the dialogues (Chapter 4). If dialogue is the key to melodramatic genres, what are these Hallyu fans enjoying when they watch Hallyu dramas without subtitles? Melodramas' emphasis on emotionality makes them what Williams (1991) calls "body genres." When watching melodramas, the viewers experience multi-sensorial pleasures rather than just visual or auditory pleasures. According to Frank (2013), the corporeal pleasures of melodramas "display the peculiar and poignant capacity of melodrama to communicate across borders and languages" (538).

Korean television dramas, as melodramas, are capable of emotively communicating across borders and languages. However, these dramas' abilities to touch viewers across language barriers and geographic borders do not mean that they are culturally rootless or that they were initially produced to be transnational entertainment. As I analyze in Chapter 3, Korean television dramas are primarily produced for Korean viewers, particularly Korean women. Hence, scholars who write about Korean melodramas argue that melodramas serve as especially important tools for Koreans to conceptualize their status in the rapidly modernizing Korea. For instance, in Nancy Abelmann's (2003) research on Korean women's experiences with Korea's modernization, her informants constantly drew on Korean soap operas and melodramatic cinema to describe their own experiences. Abelmann points to melodramatic entertainment as one of the most popular forms of entertainment in Korea and goes on to say that they are popular because melodramas dramatize issues that are prevalent in modernizing societies undergoing rapid change. The assumption here is that melodramas, with their focus on emotionality, are best suited for viewers to use to describe the intense emotions that they felt while going through rapid modernization.

Kathleen McHugh (2001) also links Korean melodramas with the emotions and

experiences attached to Korea's rapid modernization; McHugh analyzes Korean Golden Age melodramatic cinemas produced between 1955 and 1972 during which Korea experienced rapid modernization alongside military dictatorships and social unrest. According to McHugh, Korean melodramatic cinema is different from its Hollywood counterpart in that the melodramatic storylines are not just about personal moral conflicts but are about the Korean national dilemma within a global neoliberal context. As I have briefly noted above, US critics have frequently derided Hollywood melodrama's proclivity for converting political and social problems into easily solvable and "trivial" personal problems. In contrast, McHugh argues that in Korean melodramas, personal problems become the basis for discussing the larger familial, social, and political problems that Korea faced during modernization. In particular, McHugh argues that the female characters in these Korean melodramas represent the irresolute, ambivalent, and contradictory nature of Korean society during its modernization period. As both Abelmann and McHugh point out, melodramas are foundational to understanding Korean modernity. At the same time, in my research, I go beyond the timeframe of the Korean modernization period to show how melodramas are relevant to Korea (and beyond Korea) now in the form of Hallyu.

The turbulent history of Korean politics has shaped Korean television dramas in the twenty-first century. Korean dramas were not always perceived as melodramatic "women's genres." After Korean independence from Japan in 1945, Korean media producers actively refused to utilize *Shinpa*, the soap opera-esque affective entertainment genre originating in Japan in which the actors portray over-the-top emotions, because it was seen as a relic of Japanese colonialism. Instead, they borrowed storylines from classic works of US literature and television programs and adapted them into Korean dramas. These processes were facilitated by the US military who were stationed in Korea after the Korean War (Won 2013). Won Yong Jin (2013)

argues that due to the US influence, Korean dramas during this era carried strong messages of anti-communism, and they promoted the patriarchal order as a solution for Korean society to return the war-torn and haphazard Korean culture to "normal." Examples of popular dramas in this era include radio-drama *Insaeng yeongmacha* (*Rollercoaster of a Life*), which was based on real-life experiences and grievances of Koreans during the Korean War, and a radio-drama titled *Cheongsilhongsil* (*Blue Thread Red Thread*) which debuted in 1956 with stories of triangular romances. Many Koreans were not wealthy enough to own television sets in the immediate aftermath of the Korean War, so television broadcasting was almost non-existent during this time. Television broadcasting became mainstream in the 1960s. The 1960s were a tumultuous period, beginning with a coup d'état in 1961. The new government attempted to make television mainstream in Korea and advertised it as "a gift of the revolutionary government" to Korean citizens (Lim 2011). After it bestowed its "gifts" to Korean citizens, the "revolutionary government" actively used broadcasting, especially television dramas, for disseminating government propaganda (Lim 2011).

The 1970s were unofficially the beginning of Korean television drama's golden age because the "developmental dictatorship" government of the time distributed television signal receivers to the Korean citizens to boost Korea's modernization process (Lee 2014). Under a dictatorial government, the dramas remained overtly political and featured plots and characters who supported or advertised the government's national policy (Lee 2014). Meanwhile, in this era, decades removed from Japanese colonialism, reservations against Japanese *Shinpa* (melodrama) waned and the Korean dramas began utilizing *Shinpa (Jo 2013)*.

The 1970s golden era of Korean dramas began as more women rose to fame as drama writers. Before the 70s, in Korea, drama writers were predominantly men because it was deemed

a job reserved for highly educated scholars, novelists, and poets (most of whom were men); they were expected to reform and lay the foundation for the beginning of Korean broadcasting (Go 2013). The television drama *Assi* (*Misses*), written by one of the first female scriptwriters in Korea, was telecast in 1970 and became the most popular television drama of this era. It was a daily drama that aired for twenty minutes from 9:30 pm to 9:50 pm. It garnered so much success that it aired for almost a year amassing 253 episodes, and it remains one of the longest-running dramas in Korean television history.

By the 1990s, Korea was free from military dictatorship and Korean popular discourse about Korean television dramas characterized them as women's genres. It was said that women writers dominated the market and created dramas primarily aimed at women viewers. This era saw the broadcasting of one of the most-watched dramas in Korean television history called *Moraeshigye* (*Sandglass*). It was a 24-episode drama that aired in 1995. It averaged 46% Nielson ratings, and the finale had ratings of 64.5%, suggesting that more than half of the Korean population tuned into the drama's finale. The story revolves around three childhood friends who come of age in Korea during the turbulent 1970s-1990s. One of the characters grows up to become a mob boss, another becomes the heiress of a casino, and the third protagonist becomes a righteous prosecutor. Their lives and relationships change because of social turbulence as well as the romantic choices they make throughout their lives. The melodramatic storyline culminates to the point that the protagonist who became a prosecutor ends up ordering the death sentence of his long-time childhood friend who became a mob boss.

As I have noted above, at its inception in the 1950s, Korean television did not utilize melodramatic (*shinpa*) methods due to its association with Japanese culture. However, from the 1960s through the 1980s, as Korea experienced rapid modernization, melodrama was

reintroduced into Korean popular culture because it was deemed an apt storytelling method that best represented Koreans' experiences with rapid modernization. Furthermore, the Korean government used melodramatic stories to promote modernization projects. This is similar to the ways the Indian and Egyptian governments respectively used television serials to reformulate the concept of national subjecthood at specific junctures in their postcolonial histories (Mankekar 1999, Abu-Lughod 2008).

In the twenty-first century, through Hallyu, Korean melodramas contribute to Korean soft power through their depiction of "soft" Korean masculinity. Why is melodrama the medium through which Korean masculinity is being reconfigured? Furthermore, how is melodrama facilitating transnational intimacies between Hallyu fans/tourists and Korean men?

Melodramatic Convergences: Fantasy and Reality

The key question here is, how are fantasy and reality interlinked through melodrama? According to Lauren Berlant (2008), some women engage with fantasies because of their desires to escape reality: "For many people, sentimentality and the fantasy of a better proximate world so close that one can experience it affectively without being able to live it objectively produces art that does, that transports people somewhere into a *situation* for a minute" (31). Berlant critiques these women for seeking solace in fantasies that are devoid of reality and realistic activism. Berlant's theory of fantasy is based on her critique of women's genres of entertainment and the supposed female complaints resonant in them. According to Berlant, some women wholeheartedly engage in the female complaints expressed in the fantasy world of entertainment. However, she argues, the female consumers of such entertainment do not utilize their fantasy-driven rages in real life to subvert the social conditions that cause gender inequality. Hence, she

critiques “female complaints” in such entertainments as only “half-truths”: they register the failure of femininity but do not channel such awareness into the dismantling of gender norms.

Berlant’s argument against this “women’s genre” is much more critical than the stance taken by feminist media scholars like Tania Modleski (1982) and Ien Ang (2007a) who are more sympathetic in their evaluation of women’s genres. Modleski and Ang complicate popular conceptions of so-called “women’s genres” as escapist fantasies by urging scholars to refrain from dismissing “women’s genres” as inconsequential. Nonetheless, even these feminist media scholars do not entirely dismantle the real-fantasy binary. For instance, Ang says the “pleasure of fantasy lies in its offering the subject an opportunity to take up positions which she could not do in real life: through fantasy she can move beyond the structural constraints of everyday life and explore other situations, other identities, other lives” (Ang 2007a, 241). Here, fantasy is construed as an alternative world from the realness of “everyday life” and its structural constraints. According to Ang, everything is possible in the fantasy world because it is unreal. Similarly, in her research about online intimacy between Chinese/Filipina women and US men, Nicole Constable (2007) says, “Internet fantasies and experiences cannot easily be transplanted into real life” (265). Constable’s argument stems from the supposed disjuncture between her US male informants’ online experiences with Asian women, and their offline experiences with the same Asian women. According to Constable, while online spaces are ripe for proliferation of fantasies, real life experiences are dissociated from such fantasies. I ask the question: are fantasies and “real life” as binary as we are led to believe?

Expanding on the above-mentioned body of feminist research, I argue that fantasies are not antithetical to the “real.” The supposed binary between the two becomes dissolved through the melodramatic characteristics of Korean television dramas. Goldberg argues that in theatrical

melodramas, musical interjections offer *new possibilities of relationality* that go beyond the impasse created by "dramatic" situations. In other words, when the dramatic plot is so twisted as to make it seem impossible for the narrative to move forward, the musical act interjects to create a transition for the narrative and to tie the various dramatic subplots together so that they do not appear disjointed. Through such intermixture of music and drama, melodrama aims to "realize what the possible deems impossible" (Goldberg 2016, 161). Similarly, Abelmann (2003) argues that melodramas articulate debates between the possible and the real: "Melodramas negotiate between competing aesthetics in the apperception and narration of the social world: the realm of the possible versus the accommodation to the real" (25). While the "possible" is often equated with reality and the "impossible" is associated with fictional/fantastical, melodramas complicate such simple correlations between the possible and the real; in melodramas, fantasies also become "possible." Thus, the "real" and the "fantasy" converge in the realm of possibility.

Gledhill (1992) notes that melodrama "demands that the real world match up to the imagination" (108). Gledhill defines "realism" as a concept and a practice constrained by social, cultural, psychic, and ideological conventions. This is where melodramas become significant: they strain against conventions of realism to show what has previously been unrepresented or misrepresented. Melodramas do not aspire for verisimilitude but portray the "real" in ways that touch human emotions. Early feminist media studies scholars focused on the following question: how do sizeable female audiences *relate* to soap operas and melodramas? My research extends this query further by showing that women do not just *relate* to these genres, but *actively incorporate* the fiction-derived fantasies into their lives. Through such practices, I argue, fantasies are not just confined to the realm of the impossible but merge with the real and the possible to create transnational intimacies among Hallyu fans and Korean men.

I do not wish to imply that Hallyu fans and tourists are homogenous. Each of my Hallyu tourist informants came from diverse cultural backgrounds and had different experiences with hegemonic masculinities back home. For instance, some of my Russian informants complained to me that Russian men cared too much about acting masculine, while an informant from Sweden told me that she found Swedish men boring because they were too predictable in their compliance with women. At the same time, another Swedish tourist told me that she had to punch Swedish men at clubs to prevent being assaulted by them. Depending on their respective cultural backgrounds, my informants had different experiences and complaints about masculinity back home; even those who came from the same nations had vastly divergent experiences with men. Thus, my informants' tourist status does not mean that their identities and experiences back home were rendered irrelevant in Korea. Rather, as numerous scholars have pointed out, the tourists' racial, gender, sexual, and national identities affect their experiences at the tourist destinations (Bruner 2005). As my informants informed me, and as I observed during my field research, my informants' racial, gender, sexual, and national identities were reconfigured during their encounter with Korean men and Korean culture. For instance, my Black informants from the US had very different experiences in Korea compared to my white informants from Denmark.

Rather than attempting to portray my Hallyu tourist informants – or Hallyu fans for that matter – as a monolithic entity, through this research, I am attempting to analyze how Korean television dramas cut across the different cultures, experiences, and identities of the Hallyu fans to attract them to the dramas. What is it about the Korean television dramas that attract these women and even emotionally touch them to the point of eliciting physical travel to Korea? Some of my informants and the Hallyu fans on online forums/comment sections provided me with very

essentialist answers: some of them drew a clear contrast between Korean men and men back home based on essentialist constructions of Western versus Korean culture. In analyzing such discourses, I do not intend to perpetuate a neo-Orientalist binary. Rather, by engaging with such answers critically, I highlight how televisual fantasies profoundly impact the "lived realities" of Korean television drama viewers.

After all, as I analyze at length in Chapters 2 and 6, the "soft" and romantic masculine depictions in Korean television dramas are not the normative or hegemonic masculinity practiced or aspired to by Korean men in their everyday lives. Korean television dramas offer "alternative" masculinities to Korean hegemonic masculinities; and yet, my Hallyu tourist informants and the Hallyu fans online speak of the mediated masculinities *as if* they are true reflections of Korean masculinity, thus foregrounding the extent to which fantasy influences perceptions of reality. As I will argue shortly, this reconfigured relationship between the fictional and the real is generative of transnational intimacies between Korean men and the Hallyu tourists.

Intimacy and Erotics

What do I mean by transnational intimacy? Since intimacy refers to diverse forms of encounter, scholars use the term in equally diverse ways. For instance, some scholars use intimacy interchangeably with sexual intimacy (Berlant 2000, Lin 2008). In these studies, intimacy is often a euphemism for sexual intercourse. As a case in point, Anthony Giddens (1992) argues that intimacy operates differently for men and women: for men, intimacy comes to equal sexual conquest, while for women, it tends to be about romantic emotions relayed through intimacy. Similarly, Lauren Berlant (2000) uses intimacy to refer to sexual relationships when she states that intimacies are inevitably political because each culture has its own set of

hegemonic intimacies through which people who are differently-intimate become marginalized. Thus, Berlant posits, queer folks who practice non-heteronormative intimacies/sex acts are ostracized.

At the same time, Berlant leaves space for intimacy to be interpreted as something more than sexuality: "Intimacy names the enigma of this range of attachments, and more; and it poses a question of scale that links the instability of individual lives to the trajectories of the collective" (3). Rather than confining intimacy to sexual acts, some scholars use the concept of intimacy in a wide variety of contexts. For example, Elisa Camiscioli (2013) and Lisa Lowe (2015) use intimacy to refer to colonialism and other violent encounters. Eileen Boris and Rhacel Parrenas (2010) expand the notion of intimacy to refer to "intimate labor" which is a type of labor involving affect and attentiveness. Hence, in a broader sense, intimacy can be seen as something that "occurs in a social context; it is accordingly shaped by, even as it shapes, relations of race, class, gender, and sexuality" (Boris and Parrenas 2010, 1).

In a similar vein, when I refer to intimacies in this research, I am referring not just to the particular relationships that form between individuals but to the larger implications of such intimacies in the transnational context. Geraldine Pratt and Victoria Rosner (2006) state, "Global forces penetrate and haunt the intimate spaces of our psyches and bodies in ways that we can only intimate, and there is no territorial defense of privacy or domesticity that protects the intimate from the global" (18). I interpret the relationship between the global and the intimate a bit differently. Rather than the global "penetrating" and "haunting" the intimate, I track how they mutually imbricate each other. Ara Wilson (2016) argues that observing infrastructures conventionally considered public – such as public restrooms or the internet – through the lens of the intimate deconstructs the artificial dichotomy between the private and the public as well as

that between the global and the local. My research analyzes the transnational phenomenon of Hallyu and its many components/infrastructures (for instance, internet streaming websites, fan forums) to complicate not only the binaries of private versus public, global versus local, but also those of the East versus West, masculine versus feminine, and romantic versus sexual.

Another concept that I use frequently throughout this research is the concept of erotics. Intimacy and erotics are often intertwined and conflated by their association with the sexual; as I noted above, intimacy is often conflated with sex acts while erotics is laced with sexual attraction. At the same time, neither intimacy nor eroticism is purely confined to the realm of sexuality. Erotics is entangled with "politics of difference, shaped by the imagination, and fueled by fantasies. Extending beyond sex acts or desire for sex acts, they are often flashpoints for multiplex social tensions" (Mankekar and Schein 2013, 9). Similarly, Eudine Barriteau (2014) describes erotics as an ontological force experienced in all aspects of people's lives and which is, therefore, not just confined to sexual practices or acts.

Audre Lorde (1993) calls for women to mobilize their erotic powers in feminism. According to Lorde, erotics empower individuals, especially women, because erotic power is a feminine form of world-making. Lorde argues that the simple association between sex and erotics is imposed on us by the heteropatriarchal power structure that serves to make women feel inadequate: "On the one hand, the superficially erotic has been encouraged as a sign of female inferiority; on the other hand, women have been made to suffer and to feel both contemptible and suspect by virtue of its existence" (88). To elaborate on Lorde's argument, following the heteropatriarchal misinterpretation of erotics, women who overtly embody erotics have been demeaned as sex objects, so women who do not want to be seen as such were forced to hide their eroticism and feel ashamed of it. However, according to Lorde, erotic knowledge is much more

than a shameful trait that women should feel compelled to hide: it is empowering energy that motivates individuals to not settle for the "convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe" (Lorde 1993, 90). Lorde claims that erotic power fuels women to seek genuine change in the world rather than settle for the mundane and the hegemonic.

Lorde's concept of the erotic has been particularly helpful to my research on Hallyu tourists and their erotic desires. Hallyu tourists refuse to settle for the men and intimate relationships that are readily available to them in their cultures. They travel across continents to visit Korea to find the men and the intimate relationships of their fantasies. Due to the Orientalist as well as gendered aspects of such eroticism, the Hallyu fans and tourists' erotic desires are more complicated than simply "empowering" in the way that Lorde describes erotic power. Nonetheless, such transnational travel and fantasizing are examples of the profound power of the erotic which I will analyze and complicate further throughout this research.

I conceive of erotics as an articulation of desire that is structured by social differences and tensions. Multiple genealogies of erotics exist within and outside a particular cultural and historical context, not all of which are deemed normative (Mankekar and Schein 2013). Intra-culturally, some erotic desires and relationships (for example, heterosexual relationships between cis men and women) may be more hegemonic while others (for example, interracial, transnational, queer) may be more marginalized if not downright stigmatized. Inter-culturally, erotic practices of some ("Western") cultures may be more accepted around the world while that of others may be perceived as "deviant."

At the same time, through media, heterogeneous genealogies of erotics converge and influence one another. This is what Mankekar and Schein (2013) refer to as "mediated erotics"; thus defined, erotics reconfigure spaces, boundaries, and cultural differences as well as facilitate

physical and imaginative travel for consumers. For example, Japanese women interviewed by Karen Kelsky (1999) eroticized and hypersexualized the West and Western men, presumably due to the influence of Hollywood cinema. These women traveled to the US to have sex with American men to fulfill their erotic fantasies. On the one hand, their travel freed them from the patriarchal restraints of Japanese culture and men; on the other hand, they were implicated in the eroticized agendas of Western universalism by buying into the notion that West is more liberal and freer than the East.

In a case that is completely the reverse, Mari Yoshihara (2002) analyzes US historical data from 1870 to 1940 to argue that white American women during that time eroticized Asia through various media to escape the oppressive cultural environment at home. These white women noted how "safe" they felt when they were with Asian men. By describing Asian men in this manner, they were both affirming Western stereotypes of emasculated Asian men and, at the same time, praising Asian men's abilities to control their sexual desires by comparing them with hegemonic Western discourses of men as guardian of women's sexual purity (Yoshihara 2002). These two scholarly works underscore the multi-directionality of mediated erotics.

Erotics and intimacies are often associated with corporeal encounters and physical proximities. However, corporeally-distant erotics makes us rethink the role of bodies and proximity in eroticism. For example, how can erotic attractions between individuals chatting online (Constable 2013) or between couples in long-distance relationships (Holmes 2004) complicate our understanding of the erotic? More specifically in terms of my research, how is the erotic tension between drama heroes and heroines in Korean dramas – devoid of explicit sexual acts – interpreted by viewers? Furthermore, what is it about the mediated image of erotics in Korean dramas that inspires some fans to become Hallyu tourists with the aim of initiating erotic

relations with Korean men?

Sex, Romance, Corporeality, and Modernity

Mediated erotics refer to the erotic relations between physically-distant people which are, nonetheless, corporeal in their own right. For example, when digitally accessing mediated erotics, viewers are corporeally engaged with media technology (laptops, computers) in ways that are tactile and embodied. Susanna Paasonen (2011) notes the ways viewers place their hands on the keyboard and the mouse to make internet-based mediated erotics unavoidably corporeal. Furthermore, as Laura Marks (1998) asserts,

> Haptic images are erotic regardless of their content because they construct an intersubjective relationship between beholder and image. The viewer is called upon to fill in the gaps in the image, engage with the traces the image leaves. By interacting up close with an image, close enough that figure and ground commingle, the viewer gives up her own sense of separateness from the image (341).

Marks is saying that eroticism is intersubjective and entails giving up of one's sense of separateness from the other while also delighting in the fact of each other's alterity and unknowability. This intersubjectivity and co-mingling happens not just on an emotional or imaginative level, but also in the corporeal realm as viewers have corporeal responses – such as shivering, crying, or having orgasms – to mediated experiences of eroticism.

For example, Paasonen (2011) uses tactile and corporeal concepts of "resonance" and

"grab" to analyze viewers' experiences with online pornography: "Through resonance, something grabs and moves me, and its power to move me makes me question my sense of mastery over what I view" (187). At the same time, Paasonen also emphasizes the centrality of touch and skin contact in erotics. By focusing on corporeal erotics, Paasonen argues that the full capacity of erotic experience is untranslatable through online mediation: "Carnal resonance is a means of overcoming some of this gap by evoking fleshy memories and emphatic sensations in the viewer that can please, displease, or do both at the same time" (205). Paasonen's research centers around pornography and sex acts, which is why skin contacts feature so significantly. However, this is not the case in Korean television dramas which depict erotics and romance that purport to go "beyond" sex. In Korean television dramas, sex is not necessarily a significant cause of the pleasure that the viewers feel while watching the dramas. Romantic emotions are at the center of their pleasure. Nonetheless, these dramas are still erotic and corporeal in their mode of address. This begs the question: how are romance and sexuality interrelated in Korean television dramas?

In popular discourses in the US, romance and sex are concepts that are tightly interwoven and highly gendered. As heterosexist/ heteronormative ideologies have dictated, sex and romance have been conceptualized as mutually exclusive categories. For instance, Ann Barr Snitow (1979) claims US culture creates gendered forms of entertainment whereby women look to romance novels while men watch pornography for pleasure. More specifically, in her ethnographic research on the US Harlequin romance readers, Janice Radway (1984) observes the female readers continually distinguish between sex and romance because these women's views are shaped by patriarchal assumptions of gender, sexuality, and erotics. The women in Radway's research assert that despite some Harlequin romance novels portraying steamy sex scenes, these

novels are different from pornography. According to these women, pornography is for men who cannot understand love, while romance novels are for women like them who are attuned to their emotionality; these women express desires that men be as insightful about romantic emotions as women. My research problematizes the essentialist binary between pornography and romance narratives as well as those between men's desires and that of women's.

Some scholars distinguish between romance and sex, but I suggest that they are very much intertwined. For instance, in her analysis of romance novels, Snitow (1979) claims that female readers experience romance novels' scenes of waiting, fearing, and speculating as sexual experiences. In other words, it is not just overtly pornographic scenes in Harlequin romance novels that are consumed and interpreted as sexual by their female readers. Media do not have to portray overt sex acts to be interpreted and experienced as sexual. Other scholars who have analyzed romance novels similarly report that women readers claim to use the novels for sexual pleasure as much as for romantic pleasure (Thurston 1987). These scholars thus complicate the simplistic binary between sex and romance as well as the equally binarist association of each category with male and female desires respectively.

At the same time, romance and sex have a long history of association with the politics of race and modernity. William Jankowiak (1997) notes, "It has long been taken for granted that romantic love is the fruit of cultural refinements and not an experience readily available or accessible to non-Westerners in general. […] The hidden inference of this assumption may be that romantic love is the prize or reward of true culture" (1). In other words, as Jankowiak points out, misconceptions lead to beliefs that "refined" cultures have romance while "primitive" cultures only have sex. Such essentialist beliefs contend that "primitive" cultures are either too animalistic to understand feelings, or that they repress emotions in favor of sex. A prime

example would be the stereotyping of Middle Eastern cultures as oppressive for women: such critiques claim that women in those countries are subjugated by their culture in many aspects, including the way they supposedly do not have control over their love lives and are "forced" into arranged marriages (Abu-Lughod 2002). There is a modernist and racist narrative regarding erotics – more specifically about romantic choices – that associate it with individualism, agency, and civilization.

As Jankowiak points out, heterogeneous genealogies of romance exist cross-culturally. It is important to note that even this notion of romance and erotics being "expressed differently" assumes Eurocentrism of romance: what is it "different" from? The answer to this question is that it is "different" from the modernist conception of romance. Furthermore, romance is not inherently intertwined with modernist ideologies to the extent that Eurocentric and colonial ideologies would lead us to believe. For instance, according to David Lipset (2004), Papua New Guinea men speak of love through narratives of traditionalism rather than modernity.

The limitations of modernist conceptions of love (that intertwine love with the concept of free choice and self-making) become especially salient in cases of transnational intimacies and erotics. For example, Lieba Faier's (2007) research on Filipina migrant sex workers in Japan highlights how the discourse of love goes beyond the framework of modernity. Faier's Filipina informants, who met and married Japanese men while doing sex work in Japan, described their marriages through cosmopolitan and glamorous narratives of love. However, these discourses complicate rather than affirm the colonialist modernist conceptions of romance. For these Filipina women, love and the modernist discourse of romance are much more than a matter of individualism and agency. These discourses serve as justifications – to themselves and Japanese society – of their transnational presence in Japan. In other words, they *must* describe their

marriage (to their Japanese husbands) through the modernist conception of love to be perceived as legally and culturally acceptable residents of Japan. Their marriage, and even their residence in Japan, may be jeopardized if they are not legibly seen as individuals who fell in love with Japanese men and asserted their romantic agency to marry them. Hence, according to Faier, these women use the discourse of love in a much more nuanced way beyond the simplistic modernist conceptions of love.

Furthermore, other research on migration resulting from marriage indicates that couples who are applying for spousal visas are forced to ascribe to the generic modernist and Eurocentric conception of intimacy and love to be granted marital legitimacy by the state and the immigration officials in charge of their cases (Eggebø 2013). Not only does this show the pervasiveness of modernist conceptions of love, but it also shows the complications it creates for those whose intimacies and love problematize the normative modernist and Eurocentric conceptions of it.

Eurocentric discourses of romance and erotics draw on the assumption that "Western" modes of intimacy and eroticism are the "norm" and that eroticisms practiced in other cultures are "abnormal." Such assumptions are rooted in the beliefs that the "Western" models of eroticism based on "compulsory sexuality" are flawless or faultless (Gupta 2015). "Compulsory sexuality" refers to the "assumption that all people are sexual and to describe the social norms and practices that both marginalize various forms of nonsexuality, such as a lack of sexual desire or behavior, and compel people to experience themselves as desiring subjects, take up sexual identities, and engage in sexual activity" (132). According to Gupta, in the West – particularly the US – there is a system of "compulsory sexuality" whereby one's sexual desires and urges are taken for granted and people who do not have "normative" sexual desires are marginalized. For

example, Black men and women in the US are hypersexualized and hence made "deviant" sex objects through racist caricatures. Meanwhile, Asian men, according to Gupta as well as many other scholars (Eng 2001, Nguyen 2014), are hyposexualized and desexualized in the US context. Hence, to assimilate into the mainstream US, Black folks are forced to practice respectability politics in which their eroticism is repressed or hidden, while Asian/Asian American men have to assert their heteronormative sexual desires to escape from their position of "deviance."

Orientalist discourses have represented the "East" and "West" in binary terms such that the East is represented as sexually repressed/ive while the West is deemed to be sexually liberated. However, there are some people, like the Hallyu tourists whom I interviewed, who hail from the "West," and yet, they are drawn to the "restrained" sexuality and eroticism in Korean men (at least as they are depicted in the Korean television dramas). In that regard, from my informants' perspective, Asian men do not have to assert their sexuality to become desirable. Rather, they are desired exactly for their supposed "alternative" eroticism. How does this kind of Hallyu fans/tourists' desire complicate Western and Eurocentric perceptions of eroticism, romance, and sexuality? How do Hallyu tourists' desires for Korean men problematize but at the same time reinforce such binaries? What kind of transnational intimacies develop through the erotic desires of Hallyu fans?

Transnational Media, Tourism, and Intimacies

Transnationalism allows for the ontological expansion of our conception of time and space. David Harvey (1999) argues that due to increasing transnationality, there has been a time-space compression whereby objects, people, ideas, and media cross national borders at faster and

denser rates. Similarly, Anna Tsing (2000) posits that "globalization is a set of projects that require us to imagine space and time in particular ways" (351). Here, imagination refers not just to individual thoughts confined to one's psyche, but entails more serious active forms of work that reformulate the cultural common-sense. Transnationalism, and transnational media, in particular, broaden the scope of people's imagined lives, including their romantic and sexual lives. According to Arjun Appadurai (1996), the imagination has always been a part of our everyday repertoire through songs, fantasies, myths, and oral stories but, in contexts of transnationality, they have become even more pertinent as more people in more parts of the world can consider wider sets of possible lives for themselves than ever before.

Transnational mediascapes provide opportunities for people to blur the line between reality and fiction. As John Caldwell and Anna Everett (2003) claim, digital media can "deconstruct, recode, reconstruct and re-present formerly neat epistemological categories of say, real/imaginary, time/space, male/female, self/other, body/mind, analog/digital, art/commerce" (xii). Such imagined lives would reformulate existing social structures and hegemonies to create new opportunities and paradigm shifts. On the other hand, transnational mediascapes and imaginations could reaffirm the existing stereotypes and power hierarchies among global geographies. For instance, the novel-turned-film *Memoires of a Geisha* is a story about Japanese geishas written by a white American male author who claims expertise in Japanese culture. The story became a huge success in the US. Through the geisha characters, the Western women played at reinventing and masquerading their sexuality (Allison 2013). Furthermore, according to Anne Allison (2013), the one-sided conception of Oriental culture made reading the story not just an act of transnationality but an act of Orientalism.

Many scholars warn against the over-appraisal of transnationality. Tsing (2000) says that

the over-celebration of transnationalism obfuscates the inequality inherent in it. Furthermore, Tim Cresswell (2010) foregrounds the unequal politics of transnational mobility. According to Cresswell, mobility is a resource that is differently accessible to individuals; the politics of mobile practice makes even the same travel route feel vastly different for two people with different identities. Caren Kaplan (2001) critiques Western feminists' embrace of travel and cosmopolitanism. More specifically, Kaplan argues that some contemporary Western feminists embrace women's transnational travel as modes of practicing feminism and as a justified means of self-discovery. According to Kaplan, travel, transnationality, and cosmopolitanism are neither inherently feminist nor egalitarian.

My research leads me to suggest that transnational travel should not be unequivocally embraced as a symbol of empowerment because of the gendered and racial disparities in individuals' access to travel and their experiences of travel. For instance, from a certain perspective, the Hallyu tourists whom I worked with could be seen as the vanguard of feminist empowerment because they have the means and the power to transnationally travel around the world to fulfill their erotic desires. Rather than "settling" for the men and romantic relationships that are available to them in their home countries, they decided to actively seek their erotic fulfillment through transnational travel. However, as I analyze at length in Chapter 5, depending on their nationalities and race, my Hallyu tourist informants had very different experiences in Korea. Furthermore, as I indicate in Chapter 4, these tourists' supposed empowerment derives from racially essentializing Korean men to fit the Hallyu tourists' erotic fantasies.

Kaplan (1996) is particularly critical of tourism's role in the perpetuation of "imperialist nostalgia." She argues that Euro-America experiences imperialist nostalgia through the intersection of transnationality and modernism: the global "periphery" is assigned to the status of

the “past” while Euro-America, in comparison, is assigned to the status of modernity and futurity. Such practice solidifies a temporal-spatial distinction between the so-called “center” and the “periphery.” According to Kaplan, only middle- and upper-class Euro-Americans, privileged enough to be culturally myopic, utilize tourism as a quest for self-discovery and a sense of superiority compared to the “periphery.” I would argue that this critique of tourism is only applicable in the center-periphery model in which the West is always positioned at the center; different politics of mobility apply to tourists outside the white Euro-American center-periphery model. Nonetheless, I find Kaplan’s perspective generative; as she states: “Tourism must not be separated from its colonial legacy, just as any mode of displacement should not be dehistoricized or romanticized” (63).

In this context, transnational media become even more germane when considering that in media-inspired-tourisms, fantasies and realities do not just blur, they even become realizable. With the fast development of visual media, one of the central debates in tourism studies revolves around whether virtual-media-tourism can replace physical tourism. Due to easy access to transnational experience through new media, John Urry (2011) states the “tourist gaze” is no longer a unique gaze embodied by transnational tourists. To extrapolate on Urry’s argument, when the internet and transnational media consumptions were not as prolific as they are now, the tourist gaze was one that was only embodied by tourists traveling to foreign places. Through the tourist gaze, they eagerly pined for the authenticity of other cultures. However, nowadays, there is less sense of novelty attached to the tourist gaze (Urry and Larsen 2011). According to Urry, the tourist gaze is now a part of our everyday lives through popular culture which allows easy “access” to cultures and people from other parts of the world.

However, tourism comprises more than the visual experience: it is a multisensorial,

synaesthetic, as well as a kinetic experience. Visual technologies have developed at a faster rate than technologies that enhance other bodily senses. Eve Sedgwick (2003) provides a case in point when she observes that with visual technology, we can now see from the smallest nanometers to the largest scale of a universe. Sedgwick points out that no such intricate technological advances have yet come to fruition for other bodily senses. It means that with virtual tourism through media, people can only experience the visual and aural impacts of tourism rather than the combination of all other bodily senses that create and enhance the experience of tourism. Therefore, despite fast technological advances in virtual technology as well as those associated with traveling, the number of tourists has not decreased but increased throughout the years. Consumers of media do not just satisfy themselves with what they see on screen, they invest their money and time to visit the sites in person (Couldry 2007, Iwashita 2008, Torchin 2002, Kim 2010b). Thus, media may inspire and serve as substitutes for people who cannot afford to travel, but they do not completely replace corporeal experiences of tourism.

Media-facilitated tourism does not eliminate the discrepancies and discriminations latent in individual experiences and access to tourism. New technologies create new inequalities depending on people's and nations' ability to use the new media to their benefit (Shaw and Williams 2004). Some regions of the Global South have been converted into theme parks for tourists from the Global North due to the influence of transnational media (Davin 2005). Geographic inequalities and power dynamics exist in all types of tourism from a religious pilgrimage to heritage tourism and television tourism. The romance and sex tourism that revolve around interpersonal encounters doubly emphasize such power dynamics. Research on romance tourism by white European and US women to the Caribbean highlights such complex power dynamics; the women's economic advantage over the local men gives them power over these

men (Taylor 2001). Their race and class privileges allow them to disavow local gender norms and be treated as women with men's privileges (Pruitt and LaFont 1995, Jeffreys 2003).

Both female and male sex tourists can be predatory and hostile (Taylor 2001). In fact, Jamaican men who date white female tourists have stated that they feel used by the women tourists (Pruitt and LaFont 1995). What is more, both male and female sex/romance tourists justify their erotic desire for locals by stating that the locals, chiefly men from places like the Caribbean or women from Southeast Asia, are just doing what is natural to them: being sexual (Hobbs, Na Pattalung, and Chandler 2011). Thus, class, race, gender, and colonial perceptions shape the intimate connections formulated between the locals and the tourists.

Hallyu fans' romance tourism to Korea is dictated by the intersections of different social structures and power dynamics. However, I argue that the Korean case differs from other popularly researched cases of romance tourism in that, compared to men in places like Jamaica, Egypt, or Argentina (places frequented by female romance tourists), Korean men are perceived as much less sexual due to racist stereotypes. While other locales and local men are deemed sexual by nature, Korean men are deemed sexually "restrained." Despite (or because of) their assumptions about Korean men's "restrained" sexuality, thousands of Hallyu tourists visit Korea every year in search of an ideal intimate partner. Why would they choose Korea as a romance tourism destination? What do they seek in Korea that they do not find back home? And how do their erotic desires for Korean men relate to the Korean government's quest for soft power?

Korean Nationalism versus Hallyu-Driven Interracial, Intercultural Intimacies

Soft power relies on the notion that cultural exchanges and encounters heavily influence perceptions about a nation. Soft power, thus conceived, affects the number of tourists to the

nation and the profits generated by tourism and, indirectly, also impacts the nation's political and economic standing on the global stage. Even though many scholars question the effectiveness and the existence of soft power (Hall and Smith 2013), countries still compete against each other for it. For example, stereotypical representations of England focus on images of old and regal mansions, aristocracy, and monarchy in part because of it being depicted in such terms in period dramas and films (Iwashita 2008). Likewise, Egypt is portrayed through a preponderance of images of widespread deserts, pyramids, mysterious pharaohs, and mummies. Romance tourists base their assumptions about local men on such media representations that circulate transnationally; hence, romance tourists describe Egyptian men as more "at one with nature" and "religious" as opposed to men elsewhere (Jacobs 2009).

Media images are essential to the formation of soft power. Thus, the Korean government supports and promotes Hallyu not only because of its economic value but also because of its political value in reshaping the global image of Korea. In the minds of many, to this day Korea is remembered as a war-torn country and the remaining bastion of Cold War politics. However, thanks to Korean popular culture, in young people's minds around the world, Korea is no longer a dangerous place or a potential war zone but a country where people know how to have fun and be romantic.

Some scholars argue that scholarly literature on transnational media primarily focuses on uneven flows of media from the West to the East (Berry 2010, Choi 2011). Admittedly, Hollywood products have dominated the global media market and have thus globally disseminated stereotypical and racist images of various cultures and people. However, I argue that transnational media are comprised of multiple nodes of media production, and these nodes contest problematic stereotypes about a given place or culture. As a case in point, transnational

media produced in Asia show multiple ways in which Asians desire and produce erotics, breaking from the Orientalist stereotype of Asia as a place where Western men visit to realize their sexual fantasies (Mankekar and Schein 2013). Through these media, Asians are reconstituted as those who desire and perform erotics as active agents and not just as passive recipients of Western male demands. Korean television dramas are examples of transnational media that portray Asians (more specifically, Koreans) as active agents of romance.

Given the affective potency of nationalist discourses in Korea, are the interracial relationships between Korean men and the Hallyu tourists celebrated outcomes of Hallyu? I pose this question because, throughout its history, Korea has defined itself as *danil minjok*. This is a conservative nationalist concept that takes pride in Korea being a "pure" mono-ethnic nation. Based on such premises, women who had relations with non-Korean men were ostracized from society even if they were taken against their will (Min 2003). During World War II, some Korean women were taken to the war front as sex slaves to serve Japanese soldiers. If they survived and returned to Korea, they were treated with coldness by their Korean neighbors as well as their own families who thought them shameful for being alive after having "slept" with foreign men (Min 2003). Beginning in the 1950s, interracial relationships in Korea were epitomized by Korean women's relationships with US soldiers stationed in Korea. These women were derogatorily called *yang-gongju* (Yankee princess) and, if they became pregnant and had children, those multiracial children were ostracized within Korea (Cho 2006, Lee 2008). The most famous example of such multiracial children is former NFL football player Hines Ward who played for the Pittsburg Steelers and won the Super Bowl MVP in 2006. Ward's mother was a Korean woman who could not bear the harsh realities of raising a multi-racial child in Korea. She moved to the US and raised Ward there instead of in Korea. In this sense, throughout Korean

history, interracial relationships were epitomized by intimacies between Korean women and foreign men. Such relationships "often reminded South Koreans of foreign invasion or a betrayal of nationalism" (Kim 2014b, 304). Interracial relationships and Korean women involved in such relations symbolically represented the powerlessness of the Korean men/nation in the face of a foreign power.

Korean perceptions of interracial relationships have shifted dramatically in recent years. Since the early 2000s, with the rapid urbanization of Korea, young Koreans of marriageable age left the countryside to live and find work in the cities. Men who were tied to the land for various reasons, including their occupation (farming), were left in the countryside with a lack of eligible single Korean women. These Korean men's single status became an enigma for themselves and the rest of the Korean society. They thus began turning to Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia to look for a solution: mail-order-brides (Kim 2014b). According to Minjeong Kim (2014b), Korean men who marry "mail-order brides" compensate for their masculine "failure" (to woo single Korean women) by reaffirming their masculine power through discourses of how much their wives love them. Kim argues that talking about one's sexual virility is considered crude in Korea, hence these rural Korean men with mail-order brides use the rhetoric of romance (*yeonae*) and love (*sarang*) as stand-ins for their masculine ability to assert their power over their wives. In that regard, as I discuss in Chapter 6, rural Korean men who marry interracially, and the young Korean men who date Hallyu tourists, share a common practice of reestablishing their masculine hierarchy through tropes of love and romance to narrate their interracial relationships.

Although romance (*yeonae*) and love (*sarang*) are a huge part of Korean men's appeal to Hallyu tourists, those concepts are not "traditionally" Korean. The emotions related to the words presumably existed in Korea before the concepts of "romance" and "love," but the word *sarang*

(love) is first documented in Korea in the 1800s in a translation of a Christian phrase; it referred to "God's love" (Kwon 2005). Here, *sarang* (love) had no romantic or erotic connotations. Instead, it was regarded as the highest moral value judgment and a way for religious people to love everyone without discrimination. After Christianity introduced the concept of *sarang* in Korea, it was incorporated into nationalist causes. According to Bodurae Kwon (2005), during its inception in Korea, *sarang* was not an emotion you romantically felt for another person; it was an emotion one felt *for the nation*. For a long time in Korea, the concept of love existed outside of romance. According to Kwon, it was only after "free marriage" (i.e. "love marriages" or non-arranged marriages) became popularized in Korea in the late-1800s and early-1900s that romance and love became intertwined and love finally became an erotic concept. The word romance (*yeonae)* itself came to Korea through the translation of English and Japanese literature (Kwon 2005). The initially-foreign concepts of *sarang* and *yeonae* intertwined to undercut Korean traditional family systems based on one's patrilineage and bloodlines. These concepts instead created new methods of family-making that were rooted in feelings of *sarang* and *yeonae*.

Decades after the concepts of romance and love became invaluable among Korean youth as tools for usurping traditional models of marriage, they still play significant roles in problematizing normative concepts of intimacy. According to my Hallyu tourist informants, romance and love are what the Hallyu tourists look for when they come to Korea. My informants described Korean men as, to put it positively, romantics, and to put it negatively, effeminate and weak. The Hallyu tourists' characterization of Korean men in such a manner, combined with the Korean men's erotic desire for foreign women, complicate hegemonic assumptions of gender, race, and intimacy within Korea.

But where do racist practices end and romantic desires begin? Through this research, I analyze the articulation of media, Orientalism, transnationalism, gender, race, and sexuality in complicating the supposed binary between the East/West, corporeality/emotionality, sex/romance, and reality/fantasy. I ask: what kind of depictions of Korean masculinity are the Hallyu tourists drawn to? What motivates their Hallyu tourism? Furthermore, how are such masculinities ensconced in the broader history and scope of Korean masculinities? I will devote the last segment of this chapter to analyzing the various forms of Korean masculinity that exist/ed in Korea and how they gave rise to the "soft" masculinity popularized among Hallyu fans/tourists.

Korean Masculinity

K-pop often highlights those traits of Korean masculinity that make them appear oppositional to domineering patriarchal masculinity. For example, Chuyun Oh (2015a) argues that male K-pop idols' versatile performance of gender in between "beast idol" and "flower boy" create androgynous masculine figures. Beast idols are "men whose bodies and characters are masculine and tough like a 'beast'" while flower boys are "males who have pretty facial features and slim and attractive body shapes" (Oh 2015a, 63). K-pop idols exist between these two gender performances to create an androgynous persona that appeals to fans looking for alternatives to hegemonic masculinity. However, such gender performances could be interpreted very differently depending on the cultural backgrounds of the audience. A prime example is the K-pop star Rain (*Bi*) who ventured into the US market in the early twenty-first century through roles in Hollywood action films.[1] He was successful in Asia because he marketed himself as a

[1] Rain played a role in *Speed Racer* (2008) and the lead role in the Hollywood film *Ninja Assassin* (2009).

cute and innocent man with a muscular physique. However, his marketing tactics were not as successful in the US. The same image that made him popular amongst his Asian fans was interpreted as too soft, effeminate, and weak in the US context (Shin 2009).

Hence, it may seem surprising that Korean television dramas' depictions of masculinity that emphasize masculine softness, effeminacy, and romanticism are garnering popularity not only in the US but all over the globe. Millie Creighton (2009) notes how Korean dramas facilitated the global image of Korean men as "gentle, sweet, sensitive, and nice to women" (32). According to the Japanese women interviewed by Creighton, Korean men are depicted in the dramas as desirable mates. Liew et al (2011) describe Korean drama heroes as "sensitive male characters who were willing to sacrifice everything for their love" (294). These caricatures are the primary reason for the Korean dramas' transnational appeal alongside their "sexually sanitized treatment of romance" (Liew et al. 2011, 298). According to Liew et al, Singaporean female viewers initially held negative images of Korean men as chauvinistic men who adhere to patriarchal traditions but, after watching Korean dramas, they dramatically changed their perception of Korean men. Along with many other scholars, Joanna Elfving-Hwang (2011) categorizes these types of attentive, sensitive, expressive, fashionable, young, and "safe" masculinity as *kkonminam* (flower boy) masculinity. My informants saw Korean men embodying such masculine traits as "safe" because these men perform purportedly feminine traits such as being emotional and fashionable. Therefore, the assumption is that they are not invested in enforcing gender hierarchies through their physical or sexual power. Furthermore, the flower boys are seen as young and innocent and thus incapable of wielding daunting patriarchal power over women (Elfving-Hwang 2011). Sun Jung (2006) refers to such romantic flower boys as embodying "soft masculinity." Jung uses the example of the actor Bae Yong-Joon in the Hallyu

drama *Winter Sonata* (2002) to make her case; the Japanese fans interviewed in Jung's research note Bae's sincerity, loyalty, and maturity as the main reasons they love him and his character in the drama.

For some scholars, the popularity of Korean television drama heroes' soft masculinity speaks to a larger pan-East Asian trend towards "alternative" masculinities. Jung (2010b) points out that the hybrid masculinity of Korean drama heroes combines traits of femininity with masculinity and represents alternative masculinity that is becoming popular not just in Korea but in the pan-East Asian context. Similarly, Kam Louie (2012) argues that there has been a long history of "beautiful men" in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean culture spanning Japanese Kabuki theaters to Beijing Opera, and Japanese *Otomen* manga that depicts men skilled in both traditionally feminine and masculine activities. Louie also argues that the rise of such alternative masculinity coincides with the increase in consumer power of women in the East Asian nations. According to Louie, the "soft" male ideal is becoming more mainstream because women are wielding their powers as consumers to influence the social norms of ideal masculinity.

It may indeed be true that representations of soft masculinity are on the rise in East Asia, and that the long and intertwining history of East Asian countries that mutually influence discourses of normative masculinity to the point that they exhibit discursive overlaps. At the same time, these modalities are refracted by the cultural and historical contexts in which they are embedded. For instance, Justin Charlebois (2013) analyzes the recent rise of Japanese herbivore masculinity (*soshokukei danshi*) in opposition to the normative Japanese salaryman masculinity. He argues that, after the Japanese economic bubble burst, men who were not able to find employment as salarymen began to identify and exert their masculinity through fashion-savviness as opposed to their ability to earn money and provide for their families. However, the

development of soft masculinity in Korea is different from its trajectory in Japan. In what follows, I situate the current rise of Korean "soft masculinity" in Korea's social and historical context.

Dominant discourses of Korean masculinity were heavily influenced by the Japanese colonial occupation of Korea, the Korean War, the coup d'état, and the period of military dictatorship from the 1960s to the 1980s. Unlike post-World War II Japan where the national military had minimal cultural influence, in Korea, the military has played a significant role in the formation of contemporary discourses of Korean masculinity.[2] Korea began enforcing a universal conscription system starting in 1957 after the Korean War. It created an entire category of men who, in theory, were supposed to share the same experiences as conscripted soldiers: "The organizational identity of the military in general as an armed fighting machine generates a collective ethos that justifies the sacrifice of individuals for the sake of the larger goal, that is, the military security of a nation" (Moon 2005a, 49).

The conscription system persists to this day and is, hence, pivotal in shaping dominant discourses of Korean militaristic masculinity which are characterized by individuals' forced sacrifice of their time, freedom, and potentially their lives. Due to the way militaristic masculinity is forced upon Korean men, it engenders a sense of animosity or hostility from Korean men against those who are exempt from the mandatory military service (women, disabled, foreign, and, sometimes, the rich and the powerful). Furthermore, it creates a gender hierarchy in which militaristic masculinity becomes hegemonic as this masculine norm is positioned superior to all other embodiments of gender.

[2] This is not to say that there is no military presence in Japan because there has been constant presence of US military bases in Japan. Moreover, the Japanese nationalist rhetoric constantly calls for the nation to reinstate the national military.

Additionally, discourses of masculinity were also shaped by what has been known as "hegemonic breadwinner masculinity." In the 1960s-70s, Korean political culture was shaped by the dictatorship of Park Jung-Hee, a military general-turned-president. To boost the Korean economy, Park created a law whereby skilled male laborers (in the chemical and heavy machinery industries) could substitute their military service for years of minimum wage/unpaid labor in the respective sectors of their expertise.[3] Chemical and mechanical engineering became male-dominant fields at the same time that those two businesses became the primary source of Korea's economy. Hence, the industrial economy in Korea was heavily gendered whereby men became breadwinners and patriarchs of the household, while women (who could not earn a comparable wage) were encouraged by the state to aspire to the role of housewives (Moon 2005a). Films produced in this era reflect such gender ideologies. For instance, *Romance Papa* (1960 dir. Sin Sang-ok) depicts a patriarch whose power over the family is absolute and the rest of the family helps to maintain such patrilineal power (Abelmann 2003).

With the 1990s Korean financial crisis, the 1960s-70s model of Korean patriarchal macho masculinity waned for multiple reasons. On the one hand, countless men were laid-off from work and the masculinity associated with their breadwinner status was undermined. Breadwinner masculinity signifies men as patriarchal heads, protectors, and providers of the household and yet, during the financial crisis, women saw firsthand that because of, or in spite of, hegemonic masculine models, the men refused to protect women who were being laid off before the men during the financial crisis (Maliangkay 2013). Hence, women refused to espouse traditional models of breadwinner masculinity. The waning power of patriarchal, militaristic, and breadwinner masculinity paved the way for the emergence of representations of soft/flower boy

[3] A similar form of alternative military service is available now to specialists in law, medical fields, and STEM as well as other fields the government deems essential for the national economy.

masculinity now being depicted in Korean popular culture.

Nonetheless, just because the traditional models of patriarchal masculinity were undermined does not mean they do not persist in some form to this day. As I mentioned above, the discourses of militaristic masculinity continue to be powerful in Korea today. For example, Rachel Miyoung Joo (2012) analyzes how male athletes are described in national media as "*warriors* for the nation within the context of international competition" (114). Even if not as explicit as previous discourses of militaristic masculinity, such rhetoric highlights the persistence of discourses in which the men become not just the protectors but also the brave fighters against foreign powers. As Maliangkay (2013) argues, "The macho type is on its way out, but because remnants of the macho culture from the decades of military rule persist, many men will find it hard to open up about their anxieties" (57). Hence, the contemporary version of Korea's ideal hegemonic masculinity entails middle or upper-class status, a college education, a white-collar job, an able body, and an urban residence" (Kim 2014b, 302). These ideal and normative models of masculinity are important to keep in mind because heroes of Korean dramas are highly influenced by them. Yet, as I argue in this dissertation, Korean television dramas also problematize such normative discourses. What is it about Korean soft masculinity that makes the dramas appealing to women viewers from across the world? To what extent do these models of masculinity speak across cultural differences of the transnational Hallyu fans? These are some of the questions I will address in the following chapters.

Chapter 2

Romance and Masculinity in Korean Television Dramas

One mid-afternoon, during my field research in Korea, I was walking on the busy streets of Seoul with Emma, a tourist from France with a big smile, blue eyes, and long blond hair who spoke English with a thick French accent. She was eyeing the socks and accessories on display on the street-vendors' carts. We were being jostled and pushed by sweaty passersby from all sides. We were in Hongdae, a college neighborhood in Seoul that was typically crowded and noisy throughout the day due to a combination of tourists and Korean college students. While edging our way to our destination – the air-conditioned living room of the hostel in which we were staying – we conversed loudly in English. I yelled, "So what kind of television do you enjoy watching?" She responded, "Apart from Korean? Not much really, I sometimes watch some US shows but that's it." I asked, "What about French television dramas? Are there any good French dramas that you watched or would recommend to me?" Emma stared into space and pondered for a minute before replying, "I think dramas are unique to places like the US and Korea. I don't think other countries have a big drama culture. In France, the dramas are horrible. They are not fun at all, so people watch a lot of imported dramas from other countries, never its own drama. No, French television dramas are really boring. I don't really have any recommendations. French, German… I just think they are not interesting. They are so…dry."

Contrary to Emma's claims that "dramas are unique to places like the US and Korea," television dramas exist in different parts of the world as seen in Spanish telenovelas and Indian television serials, to name a few. Nonetheless, I began this chapter with Emma's statement because I found her distinction between "dry" French television and Korean/US television

dramas significant. What did she mean when she described French television as "dry"? More importantly, what was it about Korean television dramas that attracted Emma?

Melodrama – a genre that I use to describe Korean television dramas – is often associated with the emotion of sadness and the evocation of tears. For example, melodramas are often called "tearjerkers," and in film magazine reviews, melodramas are evaluated based on how many handkerchiefs viewers (hypothetically) need when they are watching the melodramatic movies (Williams 1991, Hanich, Menninghaus, and Wilder 2017). Therefore, when Emma said French television dramas were "dry," I interpreted her as saying that French television dramas were *emotionally* "dry" (i.e. they do not elicit tearful reactions) compared to the US or Korean television melodramas. The overflow of emotionality is central to melodramas. One could even argue that melodrama is a genre exemplified by emotional excess (Williams 1991). Melodramas evoke more than just tears or sadness: they could also startle viewers and make them smile (Hanich, Menninghaus, and Wilder 2017). However, melodramas are still described by and large as genres that move their audience to tears because tears epitomize emotional "excess."

Due to their emotionality, melodramas have often been marginalized and derided as unrealistic entertainments. For instance, Christine Gledhill (1992) says, "Until very recently, melodrama had been abandoned as a nineteenth-century phenomenon—displaced in modern consciousness by the superior values of realism or modernism and retained merely as a derogatory term to berate the products of mass culture for a backwardness excusable only in women and children" (105). According to Gledhill, melodramas were often interpreted as the antithesis of realism; they were deemed a "backward" genre supposedly only consumed by mindless women and children.

In these ways, as I noted in the previous chapter, melodramas have often been associated

with femininity and critiqued as an unrealistic genre of entertainment that women consume to escape from reality. I disagree with such critique of women's genres and women's motivation for finding pleasure in melodramas. Women do not seek melodramas merely to escape from reality. Furthermore, as I contended earlier in this dissertation, the argument that these genres are escapist assumes a strict binary between fantasy and reality in which fantasies do not fundamentally influence reality. In this chapter, I will argue that my Hallyu fan/tourist informants did not seek melodramas just to escape from reality; they did so to find examples of romantic masculinity which they could draw on to formulate their erotic desires and fantasies. For my informants, these desires and fantasies, rather than remaining separate from reality, served to renegotiate the boundaries between "fantasy" and "reality."

For example, Jenny was a Hallyu tourist who would go on dates with Korean men every night. She was from Germany with long dyed-jet black hair. She wore heavy eyeliner and dark red lipstick. On one rare day when she did not have a date, we sat down on the side of the street to eat some Korean street food for dinner. While munching on some fried sweet potatoes, she stated, "Guys back home just want to hook up without even going on a date. Korean guys actually still want to take me out on a date and get to know me. That's why I think Korean guys are attractive. They make me feel like I am in my own Korean drama." Her "lived reality" was profoundly shaped by Korean television dramas. In particular, Jenny's perception of Korean dating culture and Korean men were inflected by Korean television dramas: she referred to dating Korean men as being "in my own Korean drama." In other words, Jenny felt as though dating Korean men allowed her to make her fantasy come true. According to Jenny, her romantic experiences in Korea overlapped with the fictional world of Korean television dramas.

As Jenny's case indicates, romance-centric stories of Korean dramas facilitate

transnational intimacies between Hallyu fans and Korean men in "real life" through Hallyu tourism. According to my informants, all of whom were heterosexual women, much of the attraction of the Korean television dramas' representations of romance pertained to their depictions of Korean men. Apart from Jenny, my other informants also stated that they found Korean drama heroes (and Korean men at large) appealing because they are depicted as preferring romantic dates over casual sex in the television dramas. One of my informants noted, "The men in the [Korean] dramas are so perfect. They would do anything to please their women." How are Korean dramas' depictions of romance and romantic masculinity attracting transnational Hallyu fans? How is love translated televisually to speak across cultural differences?

I argue that these dramas utilize various televisual techniques to depict romantic relationships that undermine various archetypes of masculinity. Not all Korean television dramas are Hallyu dramas. While some primetime television dramas are consumed by millions of viewers around the world, other types of Korean television dramas, such as daily morning dramas (thirty-minute television dramas that air during morning time and are geared towards housewives who are home at the time of the broadcast), are rarely translated and disseminated online for the transnational audience. Granted, online streaming increased the trend of "spreadable media" (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013) that are disseminated and viewed around the world. Hence, it would be impossible to demarcate between Korean television dramas that are part of Hallyu and those that are not part of Hallyu. Nonetheless, prime time dramas with huge production funds and well-known actors tend to be more integrally associated with Hallyu than other types of Korean television dramas. Therefore, for my research, I defined a television drama as a part of Hallyu (or as Hallyu drama) if it is a primetime drama that has been exported

to transnational digital streaming platforms or broadcasting networks in other countries.

In this chapter, I analyze three popular Hallyu dramas: *My Love from the Star* (2014), *Descendants of the Sun* (2016), and *The Guardian: Lonely and the Great God* (2016). These were the three dramas that my Hallyu tourist informants mentioned most frequently as their favorites at the time of my fieldwork in 2017-2018.[4] I argue that these three dramas depict heroes who are in control of their emotions and sexual desires, loyal, and willing to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the heroines. Through such traits, these protagonists problematize notions of masculinity tied to patriarchal masculine tropes of authority and power. My informants not only derived pleasure from these images but also drew upon such images to desire and seek intimacy with Korean men in "real life."

In each of the following sections, I analyze how the heroes of these dramas challenge Korean hegemonic discourses of masculinity such as those of militaristic masculinity and "breadwinner" masculinity. I analyze the portrayal of masculinities in these dramas and juxtapose them to hegemonic discourses of Korean masculinity. My Hallyu tourist informants comprehended the "alternative" qualities of the drama heroes' masculinities *as true reflections of Korean masculinity*, which inspired them to travel to Korea to seek intimate relations with Korean men. Hence, my critical analyses of the fictional drama heroes foreground how the drama-inspired fantasies, far from being inconsequential, profoundly influenced my informants in "real life." In that regard, how did the dramas emotionally resonate with my informants? Why did they find the dramas entertaining in the first place?

Before I attempt to answer these questions, I will briefly highlight how Korean television

[4] Even though my informants occasionally mentioned classic Hallyu dramas like *The Jewel in the Palace* (2002) or *Winter Sonata* (2002), most of them seemed to have already moved beyond such dramas which have already been thoroughly studied and analyzed in Hallyu scholarship (Han and Lee 2008).

dramas' depictions of romance are heavily influenced by Korean broadcasting regulations. I interrogate the broadcasting regulations to contend that Korean cultural stigma against overt sexuality may provide a foundation for the Korean drama heroes' "alternative" qualities such as their sexual restraint and romantic characteristics.

Regulating Masculine Sexuality

According to Liew et al (2011), some transnational fans of Korean dramas claim they favor Korean dramas above US or Japanese dramas because of the "sexually sanitized" way that Korean dramas depict romance. I disagree with the argument that Korean television dramas are "sexually sanitized" per se; they are sexual, albeit in a more "restrained" manner compared to visual entertainments from other countries such as the US. For example, while some of the main attractions of US television dramas like *The Game of Thrones* or *Sex and the City* are in their explicit depictions and descriptions of sex, Korean television drama characters refrain from such sexual explicitness. Yet, these stories are based on sexual and erotic tension between the protagonists: as will be analyzed later in this chapter, Korean dramas portray erotic attractions through televisual techniques and other symbolic romantic gestures.

Although I disagree with the idea that Korean television dramas are "sexually sanitized," the strength of the word "sanitized," which some Hallyu fans in other studies used to describe Korean dramas, indicates the extent to which they perceived Korean television drama characters to be sexually restrained. The sexual restraint of the characters in Korean dramas stems from Korea's strict rules regarding broadcasting. Korea Communications Standards Commission (KCSC) is technically an organization that works independently of the government. However, the president of Korea appoints members of the commission and thus it is not entirely a non-

government organization per se. Furthermore, the fact that the country's president chooses the head of KCSC shows the gravity attached to the role of KCSC. It has lengthy broadcasting rules which it enforces throughout various forms of media including the televisual, cinematic, and online media. It has the power to block harmful media, compel the producers of the problematic contents to erase/edit contentious scenes, and fine people involved in the creation of the problematic media if they do not heed the recommendations of the KCSC.[5]

An entire section of the KCSC's rule book is dedicated to the regulation of the portrayal of sexual activities. According to Section 5, Article 35 of the Broadcasting rules, 1) television shows should not portray unethical or inappropriate relationships between men and women. If such a depiction is inevitable for the narrative flow, the program has to be especially careful in how it depicts such relationships. 2) Televised media should not describe sexuality in a sensational manner nor should they depict sex as marketable commodities. 3) Television shows are prohibited from portraying sexual activities including: explicit sexual activity with excessive sexual motion and sound, voyeurism, group sex, incest, necrophilia, sexual activities in the presence of a corpse, abnormal and abhorrently explicit sexual acts, sexual organs including a child's sexual organ, rape and sexual assault combined with physical or verbal violence, the depiction of children and teenagers as objects of rape or sexual pleasure, and any explicit description of the above-banned images (Korea Communications Standards Commission 2017).[6] Titled "Maintenance of dignity," Section 4, Article 27 of the same rule book explains that explicit sexuality on screen is banned because it will arouse discomfort in the viewers and jeopardize

[5] For instance, the KCSC is responsible for blocking harmful websites including pornographic sites. In Korea, all pornographic materials and websites are banned. If one attempts to access such contents, one will be redirected to a KCSC website that warns one about the dangers of harmful content and the penalties for accessing such media.

[6] I translated the rules from Korean to English.

Korean morality and ethics. The extensive list of banned sexual acts on television underscores Korean cultural stigma against overt sexuality.

These extensive limitations on the portrayal of sexuality have resulted in the production of dramas where male protagonists are neither sexually demanding nor assertive. Rather than expressing their love through hugs and kisses, they let their eyes and their gaze express erotic desire. The dramas use various televisual techniques and plot devices to depict heroes who practice sexual restraint yet convey their romantic desires through acts of loyalty and sacrifice. In what follows, I will foreground how the appeal of Korean drama heroes comes from such non-sexual or sexually "restrained" eroticism.

Descendants of the Sun (2016) and Militaristic Masculinity

Descendants of the Sun consists of sixteen episodes which aired from February 24, 2016 to April 14, 2016. Unlike other Korean dramas that only have one or two scriptwriters, this drama had five writers headed by Eun Sook Kim (one of the most celebrated drama writers in Korea). It was allotted a production budget of thirteen billion dollars which was far beyond the average production costs of Korean dramas at the time. Taking advantage of the huge production budget, the drama partially filmed in Greece as well as in different areas of Korea. The investment turned out to be very cost-effective; within Korea, the Neilson ratings for the drama reached up to 38.8% and in the city of Seoul alone the ratings were as high as 44.2% for some episodes, suggesting that nearly half the population of Seoul watched the drama (Yonhap News 2016). The drama was sold to 32 countries including the United Kingdom, France, Italy, and Germany to name a few (Yoon 2016).

The story revolves around two couples intertwined through their friendship. It is a

melodrama about the love lives and personal growth of four people: Captain Yu Shi-Jin, Doctor Kang Mo-Yun, Master Sergeant Seo Dae-Young, and Captain Yoon Myung-Ju. In this drama, the four characters' love stories traverse from Korea to Urk (an imaginary post-war Middle Eastern country to which the characters are deployed on a peacekeeping mission) and back. Each couple faces major hurdles in their relationships. These hurdles include external factors such as kidnappings, espionage, parental intervention, as well as internal dilemmas such as doubts about self-worth. Throughout the drama, the couples overcome these obstacles one by one to make their love come true. While the couples are going through hardships, the male characters show dependable militaristic masculinity without the hypermasculine and hypersexual traits typically associated with such militaristic masculinity. The couples in the drama are notable because of the male protagonists' choice to express their desires for the heroines through restrained sexuality. Their amorous feelings are not relayed through sexual intimacy but through acts of caring and restraint. Their acts of restraint speak volumes about the characters' affections, perhaps even more so than actions and words.

In *Descendants of the Sun*, the heroes' gazes are the key to creating romantic affects in the scene. For example, at the beginning of the drama, Yu and Kang break up after going on several dates because Kang realizes that she does not want to develop feelings for a man like Yu who would always risk his life on dangerous military missions. Despite already having romantic feelings for Kang, Yu at the time only says, "I understand. I am truly sorry. I wish you well." They separate and several months pass before they fatefully reunite in Urk. In a medium shot, Kang stoops to get rocks out of her shoes. The scene shifts to a full shot of Kang in the background while in the foreground we see some blurry movement on one side of the screen. The scene reverts to a medium shot of Kang but, this time, she looks to the side of the screen

where there was blurry movement a moment ago. Following her gaze, the scene cuts to a full shot of Yu as he retrieves a package from a truck nearby. The protagonists briefly appear in the same frame as Yu walks across the screen in the foreground and momentarily blocks Kang – who is standing in the background – from the camera. The scene cuts to an extreme long shot where we see Yu walking past Kang without even acknowledging her presence while Kang stares at Yu's back. While the medium shot makes them appear as if they are far apart through the use of background and foreground, the long shot reveals that they are physically quite close to each other during this scene. It is confusing as to whether Yu truly did not see Kang or is pretending not to see her. The camera angle shifts so that we see Yu as he walks directly towards the camera and into a building as Kang fades into the background. The scene cuts briefly to a medium shot of Kang speculating, "Did he not see me or is he just pretending not to see me?"

The viewers soon get the answer to her question as the scene cuts to inside the building that Yu just entered and shows a full shot of Yu in a combination of Dutch angle and low angle. The shot highlights the bland sandy walls and the empty spaces inside the building that surrounds Yu. He is utterly alone and desolate. He dejectedly leans against one of the walls near the entrance to the building and we get a close up of Yu's face. He stares off into space and the camera follows his gaze to a mirror hanging opposite him that is facing the entrance. The mirror shows a reflection of Kang still standing outside the building. She cannot see Yu, but he can see her. The camera slowly pans from the mirror to a close up of Yu's face as he stares intently into the mirror. We are next provided with a close up of the mirror and we see Kang walk off beyond the mirror. The scene shifts to a close up of Yu's face as he leans his head back against the wall. The sound of him exhaling dejectedly breaks the monotony of the melancholic tunes playing throughout the scene. Through these sequences of scenes, the viewers come to understand the

true emotions of Yu that are unavailable to the heroine. We find out that he is acting cold not out of indifference but because he is actively restraining himself. Even though he was rejected by Kang and so many months have passed since the rejection, this sequence of scenes reveals Yu's steadfast feelings for Kang and highlights his emotional loyalty to her. Furthermore, the camera's framing of his indirect gaze heightens the intensity of his erotic desires by emphasizing that he is trying with all his might to adhere to Kang's wishes but that he finds it impossible to keep his eyes off of her. He purposely acts cold towards her to help her not develop feelings for him, and yet he steals indirect glimpses of her through the mirror.

Many scholars conflate intimacy with sex acts (Berlant 2000, Giddens 1992). However, Yu's performance of intimacy goes beyond sex. Eileen Boris and Rhacel Salazar Parrenas (2010) claim that intimacy includes much more than just tending to the other's sexual needs; intimate needs include "not just sexual gratification but also our bodily upkeep, care for loved ones, creating and sustaining social and emotional ties, and health and hygiene maintenance" (5). In these ways, the drama does not just portray Yu's erotic desires towards Kang through sexual intimacy; his desire is expressed through caring acts. For example, Yu and Kang reunite in Urk in the middle of an earthquake after another long separation due to Yu going on a mission in another part of the world. Instead of running up to each other to exchange passionate kisses or hugs, Yu stares at Kang from a distance. Yu and his company of soldiers are depicted in full shot with light from the helicopter beaming behind them. They appear in slow motion walking in rank and file amidst the dust and rubble. The rest of the mise-en-scene is dark and chaotic because of the earthquake; the group of soldiers including Yu are depicted literally and figuratively as lights in the midst of darkness. The scene cuts to a medium shot of Kang's dusty face and zooms in on it as a look of surprise appears on her face as she sees Yu. She tears up and the scene cuts to a

medium shot of Yu in a shot reaction shot. Everyone around them moves in slow motion as the scene cuts back and forth between a full shot of Yu and one of Kang. People around them are constantly cutting across the screen so we see Yu and Kang peering around the moving people to exchange gazes. Close-ups of their face reveal their eyes desperately seeking each other amidst the chaos. Only when Kang is called to help an injured person do they break their longing gaze towards each other. Later on in the scene, even when they are more physically close to each other, Yu ties Kang's shoelaces for her and tenderly ties her hair instead of kissing or hugging her. Yu thus expresses his desires for her through his acts of care and tenderness.

The heroes' sexual restraint is atypical considering the Korean hegemonic discourse of militaristic masculinity. The mandatory military service in Korea tends not only to physically separate male soldiers from female civilians but symbolically segregate them into a different class of citizens (Moon 2005a). Such hierarchy creates gendered pressures. While men are pressured to conform to certain ways of manliness, women are expected to sacrifice themselves (particularly their bodies and sexuality) for the brave young men who are sacrificing their time and lives through their military service. In her analysis of Korean television variety show *The Youth Report* (2003), Seungsook Moon (2005b) argues that the female lovers' bodies are overtly sexualized and objectified for the pleasures of the male soldiers. *The Youth Report* is a popular game show that filmed on military bases around Korea. In this show, soldiers appear on stage hoping to win a chance to reunite with either their mothers or lovers. The show makes both the soldiers and the loved ones compete in various games to win the chance to see each other. Moon notes, "Although the militarized masculinity of a filial son is asexualized, gentle, and even sensitive to the mother's suffering and pain, the militarized masculinity of a lover is indeed sexualized and aggressive" (2005b, 82). In addition to masculinity being oftentimes associated

with sexual conquest, militaristic masculinity heightens the entwinement of masculinity with sexuality.

In *The Youth Report*, the female lovers of the soldiers are subject to objectification. However, instead of protecting their girlfriends' honor and dignity, their boyfriends take part in objectifying their girlfriends. For example, the girlfriends appear on stage behind a white screen. Only their silhouettes appear on stage. The soldiers play a guessing game as to whether the silhouette belongs to their girlfriend. They analyze the women's body parts and make crass remarks about the silhouettes such as saying that the women behind the screen have big breasts or sexy legs (Moon 2005b). The women participate in their own objectification not only to win a chance to meet their lover but also because they are expected to be the sexual objects for the soldiers' pleasures. Such programs highlight militaristic hypersexuality. The soldiers assert their masculinity by expressing their desires (hetero)sexually as opposed to romantically or in a more restrained manner. In essence, Korean militaristic masculinity prioritizes able-bodied soldiers who are sacrificing themselves for the country. Meanwhile, women are expected to make their sacrifices by making their bodies available for the pleasure of such honorable men.

The gendered hierarchy of Korean citizenship based on militaristic masculinity is so pervasive that some Korean men openly make sexist claims that they should have more rights as Korean citizens than Korean women. Han et al (2017) analyze Korean men's reactions to a Korean television program named *Real Man* (2013-) which depicts celebrities experiencing Korean military life. In analyzing Korean men's responses to the show, Han et al state,

> Women were constructed as opportunistic types who abandon traditional responsibilities and only pursue their own interests. The underlying rationale is

> that today's women do not take responsibility in the area of social reproduction (e.g. giving birth to babies via marriage), yet their rights are fully protected by laws and regulations. Attributing the low birth rate in Korea to women's selfishness, a few argued that it is the women who do not deliver the children who must serve in the military (73).

In these men's arguments, military service is analogous with pregnancy. According to this logic, women who do not fulfill their biological capabilities as child-bearers need to contribute to the nation (or be punished) by being conscripted into the military alongside men. While *The Youth Report* objectifies women's bodies for the immediate sexual pleasures of the soldiers, the sentiment that *Real Man* engenders in its male viewers is one of demanding equal sacrifice from women by giving birth. In such ways, normative Korean militaristic masculinity demands compensation from women, either through sexual availability or through reproduction.

While the drama *Descendants of the Sun* honors soldiers (including Yu and Seo) for their services, they are not positioned as superior to women. Neither do the male characters themselves assert their superiority above the female characters. Especially with regards to sexuality, unlike programs akin to *The Youth Report* or the soldiers who were featured in it, the drama and its heroes never manipulate or coerce their love interests into sacrificing their bodies and sexuality to serve them. Instead of the hypersexuality associated with militaristic masculinity, the drama heroes show restraint in every sense of the word.

Most of my Hallyu tourist informants did not seem to relate to the specific ways in which the drama complicated Korean militaristic masculinity. However, they claimed to find pleasure in the ways that the drama portrayed "alternative" masculinities to the hypersexual masculinities

purportedly prevalent in their respective cultures. For example, Jenny, a German tourist with long dark hair, compared German men with Korean men by saying that German men whom she dated back home only seemed to be interested in sex as opposed to Korean men who were supposedly interested in forming intimate relationships beyond just sex. Jenny's argument is similar to Anthony Giddens' (1992) claims about "Western" hegemonic masculinity. According to Giddens, "For most men, romantic love stands in tension with the imperative of seduction […] The connections between romantic love and intimacy were suppressed and falling in love remained closely bound up with access: access to women" (60). According to Giddens, love and romance for men in the "West" are not special entities on their own but means to a sexual end; due to heteropatriarchal norms that dictate men's behavior since childhood, men merely use romance as a tool to gain access to women. Therefore, Giddens claims that "men have tended to be 'specialists in love' only in respect of the techniques of seduction or conquest" (60).

Although Giddens is making a rather sweeping generalization regarding "Western" masculinity, my Hallyu tourist informants, most of whom were from the "West," also seemed to adhere to such essentialist assumptions about romance and masculinity. For instance, Jenny was not alone in erecting a binary between hypersexual men "back home" and "romantic Korean men." Many of my informants also characterized Korean drama heroes and Korean men at large as "gentlemanly," "cute," "romantic," and "weak," while describing men "back home" as physically and sexually "aggressive." In light of their encounters with hypersexual men back home, my informants seemed to find pleasure in Korean television dramas that depicted romantic heroes who restrained their sexuality and expressed their erotic desires through tenderness and caring acts.

In other words, the drama appealed to my informants in part because they problematized

the assumed relationship between masculinity and sexual aggressiveness. The two male characters in the *Descendants of the Sun* are romantics. Their actions and words speak volumes about their feelings for the women. However, their inactions and silences are louder and clearer indications of their love for the women than even their actions and vocalizations of love. They silently look on and control their desires, never pushing the women into anything from relationships to physical intimacy. As viewers of the dramas, we see male characters who are romantic in ways that are respectful towards the women's wishes and at the same time all-sacrificing. The heroes in Korean television dramas are fictional beings in the fantasy world of the drama. How do these images influence Hallyu fans' perception of "real life" Korean men? How do Hallyu tourists utilize Korean dramas, and the fantasies derived from these dramas, to navigate the dating scene in Korea? These are some of the questions that I will address in this chapter.

Breadwinner Masculinity and Sacrifice in *Guardian: The Lonely and Great God* (2017)

Guardian aired on cable television TVN. The sixteen-episode drama aired on Fridays and Saturdays from December 2nd 2016 to January 21st 2017. It made history by becoming the first cable drama in Korea to have ratings beyond 20%; it averaged 20.5% ratings throughout the series. Within 24 hours of it airing in Korea, episodes were made available in the USA, Canada, parts of South America, and Europe (Yoon 2017). Apart from these countries, it was also exported to countries including Japan, Cambodia, Mongolia, Maldives, and Pakistan (Yoon 2017). Japan bought the drama at 2 million dollars per episode (KBS News 2017).

The drama is a complicated love story that involves a 935-year-old goblin named Kim Shin and a high school student born with the destiny of becoming a goblin's bride named Eun-

Tak. Kim Shin the goblin used to be a warrior for *Goryeo*, one of Korea's old kingdoms. He was a great warrior praised and adored by the citizens but was murdered by the king who was jealous of his popularity and power. For some unknown reason, rather than letting him die, God made him live for an eternity with a sword stuck in his chest. Kim Shin thought it was God's punishment to make him live forever while watching everyone he loves die. The only way he could die is to have the goblin's bride pull the sword from his chest, only then could he die and return to a state of nothingness. Therefore, ever since he became a goblin 900 years ago, he had been searching for a goblin's bride who could give him a blissful death. Eun-Tak is the chosen one destined to be the goblin's bride. She was almost never born in the first place because her mother got into a car accident while pregnant with her but Kim Shin saved her life through his goblin magic. Through that connection, unbeknownst to either of them, Eun-Tak became marked as the goblin's bride. Because she was saved from death by magical powers, she sees ghosts and thus leads a very unfortunate life. She lives with an aunt and cousins who physically and emotionally abuse her. She is even ostracized in school because her peers think she is weird. Hence, she is all alone in the world with no one who loves and cares for her. Since her youth, she has always heard whispers from the ghosts that she is the goblin's bride so she waits all her life to meet a goblin hoping that she will find the one person in the world whom she could finally call family. These two lonely souls Kim Shin and Eun-Tak happen upon each other on Eun-Tak's 19th birthday and hence the romantic rollercoaster of a drama begins.

Eun-Tak's dismal situation is on full display in the first and second episodes of the series where we witness a great deal of physical and emotional abuse from her aunt and cousins. They only live with her to steal the small sum of money that Eun-Tak's mother left her before dying. We see a close-up of a ringing alarm clock at 6:30 in the morning. The scene cuts to a shot of the

entire room showing a tiny space filled to the brim with miscellaneous objects. In the middle of this cluttered space, Eun-Tak reveals herself as she wakes up from under the comforter. Each shot is very short and the scene cuts from one shot to another very quickly while Eun-Tak is busy in the kitchen preparing breakfast for the rest of the family. Through the quick cuts, the camera follows her movement in the kitchen and depicts her busy morning routine. Within the shots, Eun-Tak's body is only portrayed partially because it is always either cut through with a feature of the apartment or the shot just portrays a segment of her body. For instance, in one of the shots, the camera cuts off her head and only depicts her body moving around from neck-down. In another scene, a wooden pillar at the foreground cuts across Eun-Tak's body positioned in the background of the shot. In a close-up of her face, the wall cabinet hides parts of her face from the camera. Such disjointed depictions of Eun-Tak's body highlight not only the claustrophobic environment of Eun-Tak's living situation but also the sense that Eun-Tak is not physically or emotionally thriving in this environment; she is disjointed and cut through with the jagged edges of the house. In other words, rather than being a haven, this living situation is Eun-Tak's prison. The quick cuts in the scene suddenly grind to a halt and turn to a slow pan of the house as the rest of the family slowly meander out of their rooms to eat breakfast that Eun-Tak has prepared for them. The slow pacing of the scene is in sharp contrast to the short cuts that depicted Eun-Tak in the kitchen. It highlights the leisurely attitudes of the rest of the family as opposed to the anxiety-inducing fast cuts that depict Eun-Tak's frantic morning routine. As she avoids them and quickly tries to leave the house, the camera shows Eun-Tak in a medium-shot framed at the front door of the house. All of a sudden, a rice bowl filled with rice flies from behind her and hits Eun-Tak in the head. The camera follows the rice bowl as it clanks down the steps spraying rice everywhere. The scene cuts to a medium shot of the cousins who are nonchalantly eating

breakfast as if nothing happened. The aunt hurls verbal abuse at the heroine. Eun-Tak is now filmed in a close up from the side to show both her pained face and the rice that is stuck to her hair from the physical abuse. This sequence sets the emotional background for us to understand why Eun-Tak is so desperate to escape the house by meeting a goblin who is destined to be her husband.

Even from their first few encounters, when Eun-Tak is with Kim, she is depicted differently compared to the claustrophobic and chaotic way that she is represented when she is in her aunt's house. In one notable scene, they meet each other in a wide-open and beautiful pier. We see Eun-Tak in an extreme long shot with the majestic sea in the background. Each shot is long rather than short sequences of shots pieced together. It emphasizes the wide-open space and Eun-Tak's freedom. When she is with Kim, she does not have to frantically scatter around to do her abusive relatives' biddings; she is at peace.

The mise-en-scene of this encounter between Kim and Eun-Tak was so notable that it sparked a surge in tourism to this remote pier after the episode aired. I grew up around this beach so during my field research I was able to observe first-hand the dramatic changes to the place before and after the drama had been telecast. Earlier, this particular pier had been just a forlorn and abandoned beach-front but, after its telecast, it became a popular tourist spot where tourists acted out the fateful encounter between the hero and the heroine. Some local merchants had opportunistically set up an impromptu business on the pier lending drama-related regalia to the tourists who wanted to reenact the scene meticulously. The merchants would lend tourists the red muffler similar to the one that Eun-Tak had worn in the scene or a bouquet akin to the one that Kim gave Eun-Tak. At the time, the scene was even parodied by many Korean politicians who wanted to use this viral drama to appeal to the populace.

Kim serves as Eun-Tak's savior. After finding out that Kim Shin is a goblin, Eun-Tak goes to Kim's house to beg him for accommodation to escape from her aunt. She enters Kim's home and the camera films her in an extreme long shot to depict her in the middle of an enormous apartment with tall ceilings and big inviting spaces. While the lighting at the aunt's home was blue and dingy, the lighting in Kim's apartment is yellow, warm, and inviting. The camera pans as Eun-Tak makes her way through the house. It momentarily closes in on her face in a medium shot to show her amazement but soon cuts to a full shot of her again to situate her in this expansive mansion. Unlike the scene in the aunt's house where shots of Eun-Tak were constantly interrupted by walls or other physical structures of the house, in Kim's house, we see Eun-Tak roam freely without such visual hindrance blocking our view of her. When in the aunt's home, Eun-Tak is constantly on the screen by herself, and that sense of aloneness is juxtaposed sharply with the solidarity of the evil aunt and the cousins at the breakfast table. However, when she is in Kim's house, she is constantly filmed together with him. Even shot-reaction-shots are taken as over the shoulder shots so that the two characters are always present on the screen together. Eun-Tak is no longer alone.

At first, Kim does not welcome Eun-Tak into his house and places her in a hotel room. However, through the televisual techniques mentioned above, the viewers sense their chemistry and Eun-Tak's sense of belonging in Kim's home. Soon enough, merely days later, Kim takes Eun-Tak out of the alternative accommodation and brings her back to his house so they could live together. After Kim takes her shopping for essentials, they come back home and she runs upstairs to her new room and the camera follows her from behind. As soon as she opens the door to her new room, the camera zooms and tilts to hover above Eun-Tak's head to show a well-lit, inviting, and spacious room. The camera takes close-ups of candles, flowers, snow globe, and a

bed to not only highlight the amenities that she never had back at her abusive aunt's home, but also Kim's care in decorating the room to please her. In effect, Kim becomes Eun-Tak's benefactor in their relationship.

In the beginning, Eun-Tak entirely relies on Kim for monetary support; her proclamation of love, rather than an exclamation of amorous feelings, is her method of survival. In *Guardian*, the heroine says "I love you" very early on in the drama even faster than the hero. However, in the beginning, Eun-Tak utters empty words with no emotions. In the very first episode, she proposes to Kim Shin: "I am going to marry you, I love you" she says to him smiling the widest smile that she has shown throughout the episode. In the second episode as well she says "I have every intention of dating you with marriage in mind, I love you" to Kim Shin again. She emotionally and verbally commits herself to Kim because that is her only option to escape from her perilous living situation. She does not feel love towards him. Instead, the "I love you" that she utters is her cry for help and a desperate attempt to escape from her abusive home and lonely existence. However, in the drama, Kim does not take advantage of Eun-Tak's desperate situation. Instead of asserting his privilege and power, Kim's desire for her is represented in terms of restraint and sacrifice. I suggest that Kim, although embodying a position of breadwinner masculinity, complicates it by not asserting his authority.

Being a breadwinner, or what I call modern "breadwinner masculinity," developed and became embedded in Korea through various modern events. In the years following the Korean War, the country soon came under a long military dictatorship. One of the dictators Park Jung Hee focused his efforts on boosting the war-torn Korean economy. He encouraged Koreans to seek work in foreign countries so they could send remittances back home.[7] He used his

[7] For instance, many Koreans went to Germany during this time to become laborers in work that were too dangerous or dirty to appeal to the German workforce. Many women worked as nurses to assist with

dictatorial power to shape the Korean economy as he saw fit. One of the fields he encouraged was chemical and mechanical engineering. To facilitate the growth of the field, the government instituted a program in which male experts in the field could work in companies related to these fields as a substitute for mandatory military service (Moon 2005a). Furthermore, the government actively recruited male students into higher education programs in engineering by giving them scholarships. This created a systematic gender imbalance in the job market whereby the chances to get jobs in a lucrative industry like in engineering was only accessible to men. Through a domino-effect, with men in Korea earning more money through different access to education and jobs, men became de facto breadwinners. Before the 1970s Korean industrialization, Confucian ideologies had encouraged men to be the head of the household. The particular gendering of the job market during the industrialization period added breadwinner masculinity onto the men's pre-existing patriarchal privilege and duty as heads of households (Moon 2005a).

The labor movements of the 1980s were heavily gendered and perpetuated the "breadwinner" masculinity. Much of the union activities were performed under male leadership which often marginalized gender issues in favor of labor rights. As recently as the 1990s Korean financial crisis, the ideal-type of the male breadwinner persisted. This perception of the Korean male breadwinner worked in conjunction with global capitalism to marginalize Korean women in urban areas in this moment of national crisis (Cho 2004). During the financial crisis, a lot of Korean workers were laid off but the first to be laid off were women based on the concept of breadwinner masculinity:

Indeed, the ideology of the male breadwinner has exercised power in everyday

manual labor of taking care of elderly or disabled patients. Men went to Germany to become miners.

> discourse. During the IMF period, employers openly said that it was unavoidable to lay off women workers since they were not primary breadwinners. Newspapers, broadcasts and television programmers eagerly started a "campaign to restore the husband" (Cho 2004, 33).

Many labor unions, which were supposed to protect all workers, supported this sexist practice because they were also influenced by the normative ideology of the masculine breadwinner. According to the ideology, men were invaluable as laborers and as providers of the household. Their demise or downfall supposedly (and at times literally) equaled the death of the rest of the family members that relied on their income. These male breadwinners had to be protected at all costs. Women were encouraged by media as well as the government to "restore the husband" and boost men's morale in whatever way possible by affirming patriarchy within the household. The plight of women was deemed unimportant compared to the fear of purported loss of men's masculinity. In effect, Cho (2004) states, the economic crisis functioned to reinforce Korean patriarchy by sending women back into the domestic sphere.

Thus far, I have analyzed how the television drama *Guardian* challenges normative models of Korean breadwinner masculinity. My informants did not necessarily seem to relate to or find pleasure in the ways the drama complicates traditional Korean masculine norms. However, they appeared to latch onto the characteristic of "unconditional sacrifice" that Kim Shin exemplifies; some of my informants used such characteristics to idealize Korean men. For example, one day a Hallyu tourist from the Dominican Republic came into the hostel carrying a big bowl of poutine. She was sweating from the sweltering heat and was wearing very short jeans and an off-shoulder yellow top that displayed her well-toned body. The rest of the Hallyu

tourists who were lounging in the hostel greeted her and one of them asked, "What's up with all of that poutine?" She said, "I was just walking on the street and this Korean guy approached me and said 'you are so pretty.' I don't think he spoke a lot of English but he kept doing this," she mimed the thumbs-up gesture that the Korean man was doing. "And he said he would like to buy me some food and just bought me this poutine." The other Hallyu tourists present there oohed with envy and one of them asked, "He just treated you to food? Did he ask for your number or anything?" To which she replied, "No, nothing. He just wanted to buy me some food, I guess. Everyone, have some of this poutine. There is too much for me." The other women crooned as they forked through the poutine and said, "Korean men are romantic like that, they just treat women nice. But shouldn't you have given him your number or something since he gave you food?" She responded, "No, I don't think Korean men are like that." In other words, she was saying that Korean men were not the type of men to demand something in return for their romantic gestures such a paying for the women's food or giving her gifts.

My informants stated that they derived satisfaction in seeing Kim Shin *unconditionally* provide for Eun-Tak. Instead of enforcing his authority over Eun-Tak, Kim chooses to sacrifice himself. For example, in his dramatic death scene, a vengeful ghost attempts to possess Eun-Tak's body and kill Kim with her hands. In the short moment before the ghost possesses her, Eun-Tak pleads with Kim to kill her – along with the ghost that will possess her body – and save himself, but Kim refuses. While wrapping her hands in his, Kim pulls out the sword stuck in his chest in a virtual suicide.

Kim Shin chooses to commit murder-suicide by killing the ghost as well as himself because that is the only way that Eun-Tak could live a peaceful life without constantly being bothered by the vengeful ghost. After he uses the sword to kill the ghost, the suspenseful music

subsides into an ominous tune. Medium shots of Kim capture him in pain while parts of his body devolve into sparkles of fire and float into the air. Music changes into a melancholic pop song as Eun-Tak fully regains consciousness and runs to him to hold him as if to prevent his body from turning into ash. The scene shifts between a close up of their faces as they hold each other and a full shot of them to show Kim's body slowly disintegrating. The camera revolves around them as they desperately cling to each other in a form of shot used often in Hollywood to depict kiss scenes between the couples in romantic comedies. However, instead of a kiss, their physical intimacy consists of longingly gazing into each other's eyes. The scene highlights his emotional state by emphasizing his hands on the sword's hilt as well as that of his face. They highlight Kim's determination to sacrifice himself for the sake of Eun-Tak.

Furthermore, even after he returns from the dead, Kim does not demand sexual favors in return for his loyalty or his sacrifice. He returns from death years afterward and reappears in Eun-Tak's life through his sheer desire to reunite with her: he defies death through his love. However, after his return, he does not demand anything in return from Eun-Tak for his sacrifice. Eun-Tak does not even remember him for a while because he was erased from her memory when he died. Instead of it being a return to demand compensation from Eun-Tak for his sacrifice, his return symbolizes a continuation of his fidelity and loyalty towards her. They finally get married after his return but on their first night as newlyweds, we only see them lying next to each other. The camera shoots them from a high angle as they lie in bed staring at each other. Eun-Tak tells him that she is sleepy and closes her eyes. The scene cuts to a full shot of them from the side of the bed to show Kim patting her to sleep while lovingly gazing into her face.

Kim not only subverts Korean breadwinner masculinity but also, according to my informants, he deconstructs the power hierarchy created by the "provider" masculinity which

many of my informants claim to have experienced back home. When I asked my informants about their dating life back home, many of my informants discussed the pressure they felt when their male partners paid for the dates. Helga, a Hallyu tourist from Spain said, "Most of the time, I pay for my own stuff on dates because I don't like the feeling of a guy paying for my dinner." Helga flicked her short dark hair with her hands as she swiped left and right on Tinder profiles of Korean men. Another tourist from Sweden said, "I agree. Whenever a guy pays for my meal, I feel like he has the right to demand something from me in return. It's like he owns me now and can demand sex [from me] even if I don't want to. That just makes me uncomfortable."

According to my informants, when men back home asserted their "provider" masculinity by paying for dates, my informants felt that they were indebted to their male dates – particularly sexually. In other words, from my informants' perspectives, provider masculinity was not unconditional back home; by providing for the women the male dates were supposedly expecting sexual favors in return. I asked, "What about when you go on dates with Korean men? Do you pay?" Helga looked up from her phone and pondered for a minute before responding, "No, I don't think I pay. At least not as much as I do back home. I don't feel that much pressure with Korean men." Helga said that while she felt pressure to have sex when men back home paid for dates she did not feel the same amount of pressure when Korean men paid for dates.

Korean television dramas' portrayal of unconditional breadwinner/provider masculinity inspired my informants to distinguish between the supposedly unconditional nature of Korean breadwinner masculinity and the sexually-demanding masculinity of men back home. The fantasies inspired by drama characters like Kim Shin motivated some of my informants to act differently on their dates with Korean men compared to how they acted back home. In this way, fantasies profoundly influenced the "lived realities" of my Hallyu tourist informants.

Mature Flower Boy in *My Love from the Star* (2014)

My Love from the Star was highly successful within Korea earning ratings up to 28.1%. The drama aired on SBS, one of the three major broadcasting networks in Korea. It consisted of twenty-one episodes and one special episode that aired from December 18th 2013 to February 27th 2014. It was broadcast on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Internationally, the popularity and the impact of the drama was even more sensational. For instance, in a Chinese-based video streaming website, each episode of the drama raked up to 3.7 billion hits. Moreover, the drama also popularized *Chi-Maek* (Korean fried chicken and beer combination): in the drama, it is the heroine's favorite food. Due to the drama's influence, *BBQ Chicken*, a Korean fried chicken brand, experienced 50% rise in its revenues after the dramas aired in China while *Kyochon Chicken*, another Korean fried chicken franchise, had its revenues around the world increase three-folds within the year that the drama aired in Korea (Park 2016). The Korean government estimated the profits from the export of clothes and other fashion products that appeared in the dramas to be around 55 billion dollars. The total profit that the drama contributed to the Korean economy through export is estimated to be around 1 trillion dollars which is equivalent to *Hyundai*, a Korean car company, exporting about 2 million cars (Park 2016). What is it about the drama that makes it transnationally popular?

My Love from the Star is a romantic comedy about an alien and a Korean superstar. The drama begins when the alien who goes by the name of Do Min-Jun has only three months left on earth before he can go back to his planet. He lived in Korea for four hundred years and developed a pessimistic attitude towards humankind because of multiple bad experiences he had during those hundreds of years. Moreover, apart from his close friend lawyer Jang (who helps Do

fake his death every few years to avoid suspicion for being too old), he avoids befriending humans because he is disappointed in them. Even though Do has superpowers such as the ability to stop time, he no longer uses his powers to help humans. The flashbacks in the first few episodes reveal that Do developed such a pessimistic attitude because his first human friend was betrayed and murdered by foolish humans. Due to that incident Do felt that even if he tried to help save humanity, their failure as a species would always lead them to make the same mistakes and perpetuate meaningless violence. Alien Do is counting the days to the moment he can go back to his planet not only because he is cynical about humanity but also because unless he goes back this time, he will perish on earth. Despite his wishes to live a quiet and detached last three months on earth, he encounters our heroine, Chun Song-Yi. Chun is the most popular actress in Korea. She seems to have everything from wealth to popularity and even devoted friends and a rich man following her around claiming to love her. However, everything she possesses is perilous and ephemeral. She becomes the primary culprit in the mysterious death of another actress who was her arch enemy and in one fell swoop she loses the popularity and the wealth she had before the incident. She becomes the most hated person in Korea and the target of everyone's spiteful jokes. At the lowest point in her life, she meets Do.

The drama depicts Do as a *kkonminam* (flower boy). This term "refers to males who have pretty facial features and slim and attractive body shapes" (Oh 2015a, 63). In the conventional sense of the word, it refers to androgynously beautiful men. As Elfving-Hwang (2011) also states, they are marked by their invariable youthfulness. *Kkonminam* usually refers to young men such as K-pop idols in their late teens or early twenties before their mandatory military service; they perform a particular type of youthful masculinity comprising of sexual innocence or purity as well as overall cuteness in terms of both their appearance and their behavior. This type of

masculinity is temporary masculinity embodied by some young men who possess the androgynous aesthetics and purported "innocence" before they become "tainted" by age and experience. According to Elfving-Hwang (2011), heterosexual women dote on these innocent and androgynous male figures because they seem to represent "safe" masculinity: they appear to be incapable of asserting patriarchal dominance or sexual aggression towards women. The figure of *kkonminam* is not just significant to heterosexual female fans, it is also important to men who consume such images with a sense of nostalgia because it reminds them of their innocent and youthful days (Elfving-Hwang 2011).

The drama portrays Do as a *kkonminam* through the star persona of the actor Kim Soo Hyun playing the role of Do in the drama. While playing the role, Kim was a young man in his twenties who had yet to complete his mandatory military service. The fact that he had not been to the military and that he had such a youthful-looking face contributed to his categorization as a flower boy. Although Kim Soo Hyun had a lean muscular physique, his face was so androgynously pretty that a photo of him "cross-dressing" as a woman went viral in Korea. Cross-dressing in Korea, especially among Korean male celebrities, is a form of performance that they sometimes put on as fan-service. K-pop idols or actors who are "pretty" enough to be categorized as flower boys engage in cross-dressing as a performance to show how beautiful they are dressed as a woman. They perform cute dances to songs of female K-pop idols or act feminine while wearing makeup, wigs, and hyperfeminine outfits such as frilly dresses or miniskirts. Cross-dressing is a fun performance that is not meant to define them as drag queens or queer in any way. In Korean television dramas as well, both the male and female characters frequently cross-dress without the act being seen as a sign of the characters' queerness (Lee 2015). In such ways, the androgynous aesthetics are crucial to actors being categorized as

kkonminam. However, sexual innocence is as important as a characteristic of *kkonminam* masculinity as androgynous aesthetics.

I want to focus on the complexity of the purported "sexual innocence" of *kkonminam* masculinity. Their sexual innocence, rather than being seen as a voluntary condition, is seen as an involuntary result of their youthfulness. Male celebrities who embody *kkonminam* masculinity have to appear as if they are not "performing" sexual innocence but are "naturally" and effortlessly sexually innocent. These *kkonminam* stars are not prepubescent – they are in their late teens to early twenties – but they have to appear as though they embody prepubescent notions of sexual innocence. Even if they are having sex in their private lives, they have to hide it to maintain their innocent façade. In more extreme cases, the management companies make some young K-pop idols sign contracts that say that they will not have intimate relations with women even in their private lives. In other words, they forego having private lives by having their management companies control their "private lives" as well. In reality, a lot of effort goes into creating the *kkonminam* masculinity's image of sexual innocence. However, it all has to appear involuntary and effortless.

Do complicates flower boy's framework of "natural" sexual innocence: instead of being "naturally pure," he is portrayed as being voluntarily chaste. Do's voluntary sexual inexperience is significant because it indicates that men can *consciously* practice sexual restraint. In other words, Do's version of *kkonminam* masculinity is premised on conscious sexual restraint as opposed to the "natural" and effortless sexual innocence associated with prototypical *kkonminam* masculinity. His libido is not dictated by physical instincts, instead, it appears to be controlled by his willpower. The colloquial saying in the US that "boys are going to be boys," or the Korean saying that, "men have uncontrollable [sexual] instincts" is undermined through the depiction of

Do's voluntary sexual restraint. His voluntary sexual restraint is intertwined with his fidelity to Chun. Do serves as a form of critique of Korean men who look at *kkonminam* masculinity with a sense of nostalgia. Instead of *kkonminam* masculinity and its sexual innocence being exclusively tied to youthfulness, Do shows that such sexual innocence – or sexual restraint – can be practiced by men of any age.

The background to Do's character is that he has no experience with sexual intimacy. For example, the television drama emphasizes Do's sexual purity by showing how affected Do is from his kiss with the heroine. Chun asks Do to give fifteen seconds of his time to her so that she could see if she could seduce him during that time. They start the clock and the scene becomes a split-screen showing a close up of their faces. At the bottom of the scene, a heart monitor suddenly appears with their supposed heartrates. The beeping sound of the heart monitor blends into background music. After just a few seconds, the split-screen dissolves into a full shot of them as Do pulls Chun into a kiss. The kiss scene only lasts for a few seconds. Then, the scene cuts to yet another split-screen with the words "one hour after the kiss" at the bottom of the scene. On one side of the screen, it shows a medium shot of Do reading a book. On the other side, it shows a medium shot of Chun lying in bed. Each of the split-screen cuts to a close up of their faces and the sound of heartbeats dominate the soundscape of the scene as Do's heartrate reaches 150 bpm and increases to an alarming rate as time passes. Meanwhile, Chun's heartrate slowly decreases back to normal. Multiple scenes of them two hours, three hours, and five hours after the kiss are depicted until Chun approaches Do again over the night and hears his fast heartbeat. The split-screen becomes a single screen full shot of Chun squatting next to Do's bed. Only Do's heart monitor appears on screen as his heart rate reaches 300 bpm and the sound of the heartbeat grows faster until with a poof, the numbers burst like balloon bursting. Meanwhile,

Chun's heart rate monitor has all but disappeared from the screen to indicate that her state of mind has returned to normal after the kiss. The drama uses the split screen and the comedic heart rate monitor, as well as the sound effects of heartbeats to show Chun's nonchalance about the kiss in comparison to Do's flustered and agitated state. The television drama highlights Do's sexual innocence by showing how he was emotionally affected by the kiss.

Flower boy masculinity (*kknominam*), as I use the term, is a culturally-specific masculine archetype. However, it falls under the category of "soft" masculinity with similar traits found in other East Asian nations such as China and Japan. For example, in twenty-first-century Japan, there is "herbivore" masculinity (*Soshokukei Danshi*) which is similar to *kkonminam* masculinity. It appeared as a form of non-hegemonic masculinity in opposition to the normative Japanese salaryman masculinity (Charlebois 2013). *Soshokukei Danshi* are characterized by how meticulously they care about their appearance and prefer friendship with women over sexual intimacy with them. According to Charlebois, to relieve their sexual desires, *Soshokukei Danshi* would rather watch pornography than approach real women. Such masculinity is one of many among the long trajectory of androgynous masculinity in Japan such as *Bishonen* in Japanese manga who are depicted as Western elf-like men who wear makeup (Maliangkay 2013). In China, there is a long history of the *wen* masculinity which revolves around highly educated men who were cultured and devoted themselves to increasing their knowledge as opposed to physical endeavors (Jung 2010b). According to Jung, such men took pride in having soft hands and frail bodies symbolic of scholarly endeavors. Some scholars categorize all of these masculinities as a form of "Pan-Asian soft masculinity" (Jung 2010b, Louie 2012). The specific characteristics of each type of "soft masculinity" differ. Nonetheless, the so-called "Pan-Asian soft masculinity" may very well be true as China, Japan, and Korea have had a long history of transnational

encounters through wars and trades. Most variations of such soft masculinity indicate an alternative to "hard" (macho) and heteropatriarchal masculinity: Japanese *Soshokukei Danshi* counters salaryman masculinity, Chinese *wen* masculinity stands in contrast to *wu* (militaristic) masculinity, while Korean *kkonminam* masculinity is positioned against breadwinner and militaristic masculinity.

I would suggest that the delineation between the soft and hard (heteropatriarchal) masculinities particularly revolves around sexuality. For instance, Kam Louie (2012) describes soft masculinity as not having traditionally manly traits "such as aggressiveness and sexual dominance" (935). Discussing K-pop idols, Oh (2015a) argues the women fans imagine women-dominated relationships as a possibility while desiring the androgynous bodies of the *kkonminam* idols. Men with soft masculine traits such as flower boys are characterized in popular as well as scholarly discourse as not possessing the sexual drive and initiative associated with hegemonic masculinity. The flower boys' supposed innocence gives women more power and agency to explore and initiate sexual encounters. This is similar to Chun and Do's relationship where Chun is more eager and nonchalant in terms of seeking sexual intimacy whereas Do is portrayed as the one who is innocent and profoundly impacted by each sexual encounter.

The Hallyu fans I interviewed tended to believe soft masculinity was equivalent to "safe" masculinity. For example, Sarah, a French tourist with long wavy blond hair that reached down her back said, "Korea is so safe," when I asked her about her impression of Korea and Korean men. Sarah elaborated,

> When I am in Korea, I don't have to worry about safety. I just go around wearing whatever I want. But when I am in South America or other places, even South

> Asia, I have to be so careful. It is so beautiful but I have to be so uptight and careful that I don't end up enjoying it as much.

Another informant from England, when asked the same question, said,

> Even when I party really late in Korea, I don't feel it is dangerous at all. Once, I ended up sleeping outside at one of the park benches because I was so drunk. I didn't feel like I was about to get raped or have my things stolen. I woke up the next morning just fine: I wasn't raped, and my cellphone and everything were in my pocket! I wouldn't have felt as safe in England. I would not have slept outside even if I was drunk. I would definitely have been raped or mugged if I did that back home.

This notion of Korean "safety" partly derives from the ubiquity of closed-circuit television and police presence in Seoul, but it also derives from the assumption that men with "soft" masculine traits do not threaten women with violence or hierarchical submission because these men are not sexually aggressive (Elfving-Hwang 2011). As mentioned above, my informants felt as though they could dominate flower boys rather than be dominated by them in their erotic relationships.

However, as some scholars have argued, soft masculinity does not equal gender equality. Charlebois (2013) notes that in the case of Japanese Herbivore masculinity, their lack of sexual aggression does not stem from the ideology of gender equality but, on the contrary, from the notion that women are bothersome. Similarly, Korean *kkonminam* may perform effeminacy (or, at least, what is perceived as effeminacy based on "Western" standards of masculinity) but in

Korea, they are still considered male and masculine: they, thus, do not subvert the gender binaries or hierarchies (Elfving-Hwang 2011). Unlike in the US where cultural conventions ascribe effeminate men as gay, in Korea (and perhaps also in the region of the so-called "Pan-Asian soft masculinity") feminine performances by the flower boys do not necessarily indicate their homosexuality (Maliangkay 2013). Therefore, contrary to the Korean television dramas' depictions of "safe" soft masculinity, in reality, men who embody such masculinity do not forfeit their position within the heteronormative patriarchy nor undermine the structure.

Nonetheless, the trope of flower boys significantly affected the romantic imaginations of the transnational Hallyu fans with whom I did my fieldwork. Their desires cannot merely be categorized as naïve enthusiasm for soft masculinity; it speaks to their profound desires for alternative masculinity. These women came to Korea to date Korean men because the images they saw on screen affected them. The fictional stories and the fantasies garnered by them made my informants pine for a certain type of masculine quality embodied by flower boys, the new form of militaristic masculinity portrayed in the television dramas, and the drama-style breadwinner masculinity. All three of these discourses of Korean masculinity share the same thread of sexual restraint.

The Korean dramas I have analyzed problematize such gender dynamics through their portrayals of men who possess appealing "traditional" masculine traits but do not assert their authority over women. Their love and sacrifice are unconditional. Similarly, flower boys are specifically the kind of men whom the women feel like they could dominate and feel at ease because they are depicted in media as sexually undemanding and unthreatening. Part of the reason why my informants came to Korea was because of such idealistic images of Korean masculinity based on the dramas they watched. In the final section of this chapter, I will

conclude by analyzing how all three dramas that I have analyzed attract viewers by invoking the pleasures of "emotional omnipotence."

Pleasures of "Emotional Omnipotence"

If Korean television dramas' depictions of masculinity and romance were to be characterized by one word it would be "restraint." In this chapter, I noted how the heroes in *Descendants of the Sun* practice restrained militaristic sexuality and how Kim in *Guardian: The Lonely and Great God* also practice unconditional breadwinner masculine model that was characterized by sexual restraint. The sexual restraint in both dramas complicates traditional forms of militaristic and breadwinner masculinity by subverting the gender hierarchy created through the government-facilitated prioritization of able-bodied and masculine laborers. The hero in *My Love from the Star* also practices voluntary sexual restraint. In contrast to typical flower boys whose sexual innocence inadvertently come from their youthfulness, Do's sexual purity comes from his voluntary restraint throughout the hundreds of years he lived on earth.

I suggest that several representational techniques and plot devices used to depict Korean men in dramas contribute to their transnational appeal. Apart from the specific portrayal of the heroes, another technique that intensifies viewers' pleasures stems from the televisual and narrative techniques that position viewers as omnipotent observers. Korean television plots and televisual techniques revolve around the portrayal of erotic tension. Understanding the nuances of erotic tension is key to the viewing pleasures of Korean television dramas. In particular, Korean television dramas provide distinct erotic pleasures in the form of "emotional omnipotence." Such omnipotence serves to emphasize the sexual restraints of the drama heroes.

While the characters in the dramas may undergo trials and tribulations in their

relationships due to misunderstandings, miscommunications, silences, and missed timings, the viewers can see beyond those missed temporalities to understand the characters' "true" feelings; in that sense, they are omnipotent in ways that the characters are not. According to Linda Williams (1991), melodramatic temporality revolves around a sense of "too-late-ness": either the characters realize/express their emotions too late, or they arrive at a meeting place too late. Through the sense of "too-late-ness," the melodramatic storylines and their emotionality unfold. The characters do not comprehend particular situations to be products of missed opportunities until the climax or conclusion of the plot – they just believe that their love interests are not as erotically attracted to them. In contrast, viewers are aware of the misunderstandings and missed-timings and experience the emotional pleasures derived from the disparity between their emotional/situational awareness and the unawareness of the characters.

For example, *My Love from the Star* utilizes a fictional interview scene at the end of each episode. Chun and Do appear separately. They are seated in a plush couch facing an interviewer situated in the direction of the camera but not seen or heard on screen. The interview sequence begins after this fictional interviewer asks a question about Chun and Do's feelings during a particular event portrayed in the episode. The question is posed as a subtitle at the bottom of the screen. They answer in detail about their feelings. These scenes not only make the emotional state of the characters accessible to the viewers but also make the viewers feel as though they are the fictional interviewers whom the characters are addressing with regard to their inner-most feelings. Since these are portrayed as one-on-one interview format, Chun and Do are not aware of each other's answers and feelings as opposed to viewers, who are positioned as the imaginary interviewer, know the minutiae of the characters' emotional turmoil.

Theorists of US soap operas have argued that, as omniscient witnesses, spectators are

encouraged to sympathize with almost everyone on the screen (Modleski 2007). Modleski argues the spectators are divested of power because they have to identify with multiple characters and that the situation that the soap opera viewers find themselves in as sympathetic bystanders is similar to the role of housewives in family disputes. However, I contend that the viewers' abilities to empathize with multiple characters need not always symbolize a divestment of their powers. Rather, the viewers become the most knowledgeable participants of the drama plot and are privy to all the reasoning and emotions of individual characters. It is a level of emotional awareness unavailable to the drama characters.

Contrary to "real life" situations in which the emotions of others are often difficult to understand, these characters become open books to the omniscient drama viewers. While the emotions of lovers/intimate partners in the viewers' lives may be hard to interpret, viewers, as observers of the dramas' romance, have access to the romantic emotions of the heroes: from the perspective of viewers, heroes of these dramas embody emotional openness. These portrayals are central to the transnational popularity of Hallyu and Hallyu tourism. In *Descendants of the Sun*, the scene of indirect gaze where Yu stares at Kang through a mirror on the wall exemplifies camera work that emphasizes the heroes' emotions so that the viewers are aware of it while the heroine is left in the dark. Similarly, in *Guardian: The Lonely and Great God*, viewers are attuned to every minute change in Kim, the hero's, emotions because they are symbolized through weather changes. Thus, even when he is acting cold towards Eun-Tak, viewers can tell through a sudden rainstorm within the drama that it emotionally pains Kim to treat Eun-Tak spitefully.

Unlike the heroines, the viewers can see the heroes' sacrifices and heartaches hidden by their spiteful acts. The heroes do not sexually act upon their feelings and this makes their actions

difficult to interpret for the heroines. However, their restrained performance of romantic desire, combined with viewers' omniscient perspective of characters' emotions, heightens the erotic appeal of the male characters. As omniscient observers, the viewers can see through the heroes' restrained performances. The romantic appeal of the heroes come from the fact that their desires are obvious to everyone else besides the heroines because the heroes do not demand compensation or recognition from the heroines for their sacrifices. Rather, they refrain from taking credit for, or personally talking about, everything they did for the heroines. This is in line with the theme of restrained sexuality performed by various male protagonists regardless of whether they embody militaristic, breadwinner, or *kkonminam* masculinities.

Sexual intercourse premised on the hierarchy of gender could easily create a sense of sexual entitlement for the male figure whereby women would feel coerced to provide sexual favors. Some of my informants noted as much in their narratives about how they would refuse to let men pay for the first dates. Rather than imposing masculine eroticism and hypersexuality onto the women whom they love, heroes of these dramas express their erotic desires for the heroines by giving *them* opportunities to explore their sexual desires and sexual agency.

The sexual restraint and unconditional love of the male characters of Korean television dramas are some of the reasons why my informants were supposedly attracted to Korean men. Moreover, even though the romantic television dramas are deemed women's genres, based on my ethnographic research, they also influence the way Korean men behaved when they were wooing the Hallyu tourists. Even though each drama has its own unique features and characters, the similarities in the romantic drama heroes as self-sacrificing, emotionally expressive, and romantic men who are loyal to the heroines influenced my informants' erotic fantasies and the intimate choices they made in "real life." In that sense, melodramas make the purportedly strict

boundary between the “lived reality” and fantasies porous: indeed, some of the melodramatic pleasures of Korean television dramas derive precisely from the blurring of the binaries between the real/fantasy and the possible/impossible.

Chapter 3

Korean Television Dramas: Between the National and the Transnational

Major Korean broadcasting networks (KBS, SBS, MBC) fiercely compete against each other to attain dominance during primetime television: high-budget television dramas with star-studded casts compete for viewers' attention during the two-hour window between 9 pm and 11 pm. With the expansion of cable channels in Korea, the cutthroat primetime television battle is reaching a new level of intensity. If a television drama is exceedingly popular, broadcasting networks extend it beyond its original number of episodes. Meanwhile, dramas that fail to receive competitive ratings are mercilessly cut short. These primetime shows are the most lucrative for the broadcasting networks: primetime programs rake in millions of dollars through advertisement revenues (Personal interview with Yu 7/6/2016). Korean television drama production is a multi-billion-dollar business that thousands of Koreans rely on, not just for pleasure, but also for their livelihood.

In recent years, the business of Korean television drama production has become exceedingly lucrative due to Hallyu. Digital media – in this context, online streaming websites – have been crucial to the expansion of Hallyu (Kim and Nye 2013). Technological innovations foster "time-space compressions" whereby people, ideas, objects, and media transnationally move in much denser and faster patterns (Harvey 1999). As a result of such time-space compression, Koreans living in Korea are no longer the only group of viewers watching romantic and melodramatic Korean television dramas. Due to Hallyu, the transnational viewership of Korean television dramas has expanded beyond local and diasporic Koreans to include non-Korean transnational viewers. How do the Korean television drama production staff

conceptualize transnational fans of Korean television dramas? Is Hallyu changing the way Korean television drama production staff create Korean television dramas?

In this chapter, I argue that Korean television dramas are positioned in the liminal space between the national and the transnational. On the one hand, they are transnationally popular media with fans from all over the world. On the other hand, the television drama production staff with whom I worked insisted that Korean television dramas are national entertainment for Korean women. They focused on the feedback loop between Korean television drama production staff and Korean female viewers of the dramas. I argue that Korean television drama production staffs' gendered and nationalized discourses about Korean television drama viewership do not encompass the full scope of the relationships between Korean television dramas and their viewers (both Korean and transnational). Hallyu is not entirely a "top-down" process that is driven by the television drama production staff and the Korean government. Although government policies and the production staff of the television dramas serve important functions in sustaining Hallyu, I suggest Hallyu is primarily driven by transnational fan labor. In this chapter, I examine the nationalized and gendered discourses that are deployed by television drama production staff to describe Korean television drama viewership. I suggest that Korean television dramas, as transnational media, impact their transnational viewers in ways that extend beyond the discursive expectations of the production staff who created these dramas.

Some scholars contend that transnationalism and transnational media erode the sovereignty or power of nation-states. For example, Mayfair Yang (1997) analyzes Chinese consumption of transnational media to argue that Chinese viewers seek transnational media when they no longer wish to participate in the Chinese national imaginary. According to Yang, transnational media are tools for individuals to cast their imaginations outward, beyond the

boundaries of the nation-state. Yang argues that with the help of transnational media, some Chinese viewers increasingly occupy the liminal space of transnationality beyond the boundaries of Chinese national hegemony. Other scholars take a slightly different approach (Blanc, Basch, and Schiller 1995). For instance, Roger Rouse (1995) claims transnationalism perforates national boundaries but that nation-states do not experience any decline in power. Caren Kaplan (1996) and James Clifford (1997) share similar sentiments in that they argue transnationalism deconstructs as well as reconstructs national borders.

How can we conceptualize transnational media phenomena like Hallyu in relation to the national and the transnational? Hallyu is a transnational phenomenon that goes beyond the geographic boundaries of Korea. JungBong Choi (2015) claims that Hallyu is a transnational phenomenon created through the collaboration of Koreans and non-Koreans. Choi divides Hallyu into two driving forces: Korean cultural content producers and foreign fans. Choi argues that Hallyu is intrinsically "foreign" because Hallyu does not just refer to Korean popular culture. Instead, it refers to the *consumption* of Korean culture by non-Koreans. In this sense, according to Choi, Hallyu is intrinsically transnational. At the same time, Hallyu is a national phenomenon that Korean politicians and news media appraise through nationalistic discourse.

I wish to problematize binary categorization of national and transnational media because the increase in transnationally collaborative media production and transnational dissemination of media from different parts of the world has made the boundary between national and transnational very much ambiguous. Nevertheless, as I will argue, some production staff of Korean television dramas conceptualize Korean television dramas as national rather than transnational media and adhered to the binary of the national versus the transnational. At the same time, while Korean television dramas are forms of transnational media, they are also forms

of national media that are rooted in these discourses of Korean-ness and "Korean culture."

In what follows, I draw upon my interviews with the production staff of Korean television dramas to analyze their explanations for the transnational popularity of Korean television dramas. In particular, I am concerned with their interpretations of the feedback loop that form between their own discourses and those constructed by viewers of Korean television dramas. How do the drama production staff conceptualize the Korean viewers, and what kind of relationships develop between them? How does the transnational viewership of Korean dramas complicate the feedback loop formed between production staff and viewers? I use a mixed-methods approach: I draw on my ethnographic interviews with personnel related to Korean drama production as well as archived interviews and lectures given by successful Korean television drama scriptwriters from the Korean drama scriptwriters' union archive.[8] The union created this interview archive consisting of interviews that established scriptwriters conducted with each other in order to educate amateur scriptwriters on the process of writing popular Korean television dramas.

I found that even though Hallyu has heightened the transnational popularity of Korean television dramas, the production staff of dramas referred to Korean dramas as national entertainment produced by and for Korean viewers. Many of the staff working on the dramas claimed that Hallyu was, in fact, interfering with the essence of what makes Korean television dramas successful in the first place. According to them, Korean drama script writers rely on immediate feedback from the audience to decide the future directions of dramas' plots but they cannot create such feedback loop with Korean viewers because Hallyu is transforming the production culture of Korean television dramas. Despite popular discourse in Korea that hail

[8] All the interviews and lectures were in Korean. I translated the Korean interviews and lectures into English.

Hallyu as a symbol of national success, interviews with Korean television production staff reveal that Hallyu and the transnational viewers of Korean television dramas were an afterthought for many of them.

There are many events that reflect the Korean drama industry's overall indifference towards transnational viewers of Korean television dramas. For example, this indifference is most poignantly captured in an infamous incident that occurred in 2017. The first episode of a Korean television drama entitled *Man Who Dies to Live* (2017) caused a massive outcry from its transnational audience because of its insensitive depiction of Muslim women's sexuality. The episode depicts a Korean male protagonist who lives in a fictional Middle Eastern nation and converts to Islam. However, he is shown imbibing alcohol and putting his feet next to the Koran, both acts offensive to Islamic teachings which ban alcohol consumption and disrespectful gestures towards the Holy Book. However, the scene that sparked the most outcry was that of Muslim women lying poolside while wearing nothing but bikinis and hijabs. This scene portrayed Muslim women as voluptuous and hypersexualized, and the episode explicitly stereotyped and sexualized Muslim women.

These depictions resulted in movements by Hallyu's Muslim fans to boycott not only this specific program but Hallyu dramas at large for their insensitivity towards Muslims. If the producers and writers of the offending drama had considered the sentiments transnational audience of their drama (or for that matter, multiethnic viewers of the drama who live in Korea) these scenes would have been edited or never filmed in the first place. Some Hallyu fans whom I observed who were not Muslim also expressed their disapproval of such racism in Korean television dramas. Considering the transnational reach of the Hallyu cultural productions, one would venture to think that such xenophobic attitudes would be censored, if not for ethical

reasons, then for business reasons. This is especially the case given that transnational Muslim fans are significant contributors to the success of Hallyu (Han and Lee 2008). The fact that such insensitive scenes regarding Muslim women's sexuality were shown in a Korean television drama suggests that the incident was either a result of the production staff's publicity stunt to garner public attention (both negative and positive) for the drama or, more likely, their lackadaisical attitude towards transnational viewers in favor of exclusively thinking about Korean dramas as national entertainment for local viewers (who are deemed monoethnically Korean). This incident highlights the dramas' production staffs' assumption that the viewers of their dramas are Koreans who fall within the "normative" boundaries of monoethnic Korean-ness to the exclusion of those who are deemed racial, cultural, and religious "Others."

John Caldwell (2006) analyzes how transnationalism affects media production. He contests the popular assumption that digital technologies "naturally" facilitate transnational media flow which, in turn, leads to the formation of boundary-less spaces with monolithic temporalities and cultures or what Marshall McLuhan (1962) has called "global villages." Caldwell analyzes US media corporations' tactics in transnationally marketing, branding, and disseminating television programs and argues that these US corporations meticulously control the timing and the method of the transnational release of their television programs in different parts of the world. In other words, Caldwell argues that time-space compression, from the perspective of media productions, is a meticulously rationalized and programmed capitalist process rather than a "natural" characteristic of new media and transnationalism. However, the above-mentioned incident regarding Korean television drama's racism indicates that the transnational dissemination of Korean television dramas may not be as meticulously planned as the US television production and dissemination practices. This is presumably because the

production staff of the above-mentioned Korean television drama created the drama under the assumption that it will only be consumed by "Korean viewers" (i.e. monoethnic Koreans who lack cultural awareness to take offense with scenes that disparage Islam).

Kathleen McHugh (2001) says, "I consider South Korean cinema as an instance of a national cinema from this perspective: as complex and contradictory, identified and affirmed in encounters with and negations of that which it is not" (1). Although McHugh is specifically talking about Korean cinema, I believe her argument can be extended to Korean television dramas. The "national" quality of Korean television dramas becomes salient through these dramas' encounters with the cultural and ethnic "Other." Although Hallyu fans are integral to Hallyu, the Korean television drama production staff construe them as "outsiders" who are jeopardizing the feedback loop between Korean television production staff and the Korean viewers.

Translation of Emotion, Affect, and Feeling

Before I analyze the drama scriptwriters' interviews, I feel the need to explain a couple of keywords that repeatedly appear in the archived materials. Two Korean terms appeared frequently in the scriptwriters' interviews/lectures: *gam-jeong*, and *gam-dong*. *Gam-jeong* means feeling or emotion based on a phenomenon or a happening (Naver Korean Dictionary 2017b). *Gam-dong* means to feel deeply in the heart and be moved (Naver Korean Dictionary 2017a). Colloquially, *gam-jeong* represents the individual state of the mind both positive and negative while *gam-dong* implies the state of people being moved to tears or expressions of joy because they are inspired by particular (generally positive) events. The scriptwriters and producers used the word *gam-jeong* to describe the main characteristics of Korean dramas, and they used *gam-*

dong to describe viewing pleasures of the Korean dramas. In other words, according to these writers' descriptions, the television dramas aspire to stir emotions in their viewers: the writers measure their success by how much they move the viewers. In Korean academia, instead of the colloquial *gam-jeong* and *gam-dong*, there is another term designated for the English term affect; that is *jung-dong* which is used in fields of psychology and sociology. Translated, it means the heart is moved. Although it is an apt terminology to describe affect, it is rarely used beyond academic literature.

My translation of these keywords is based on Youngmin Choe's (2016) distinction between *gam-jeong* and *gam-dong*. Choe translates *gam-jeong* as feeling, and *gam-dong* as emotions or affect. Mankekar and Schein (2013) note that structures of feeling, emotions, and affect are analogous but not the same. According to Mankekar, "structures of feeling" (Williams 1977) are tied to textual/literary medium while affect circulates across various media and transect subjects as well as objects. According to Kara Keeling (2007), "Affectivity is a type of labor that is increasingly necessary to survival; as such, it is a type of labor that produces and maintains forms of social life—it is, therefore biopolitical" (Kindle edition 1934). Sara Ahmed uses similar words to describe emotions: "Emotions, in other words, involve bodily processes of affecting and being affected, or to use my own terms, emotions are a matter of how we come into contact with objects and others" (Ahmed 2014, 208). According to Ahmed, emotions, like affects, are biopolitical; they are the modalities through which we touch others and are touched by others. In essence, they are at the crux of human existence. Both Keeling and Ahmed establish the significance of emotions and affect in ways humans live and survive. Affect and emotion appear similar and yet they are not uniform concepts; Mankekar (2013) highlights that emotions require subjects while affects are pre-subjective. In fact, affects generate subjects while the same cannot

be said of emotions.

In this chapter, I equate the terms *gam-jeong* with feeling and *gam-dong* with emotion rather than affect. Even though Choe uses emotion and affect interchangeably in her translation of the Korean terms, for this chapter, I primarily focus on emotions and emotionality. The reason I translate *gam-dong* as emotion and not affect is because affect "exists at the cusp of narrativization and lies beyond (or, perhaps more accurately, prior to) semantic articulation. Affect cannot be located solely in individual responses, nor is the individual the source or even the locus of affect" (Mankekar 2013, 605). The way television writers and producers use the terms *gam-jeong* and *gam-dong* in their interviews is related to the semantic articulation of feelings and emotions. They refer to feelings and emotions in relation to how they create Korean television dramas. Furthermore, there *are* distinct loci of emotions within Hallyu in the sense that they are conveyed in between the drama production staff and the viewers. This does not mean that Hallyu and Korean television dramas are not affective. However, for the purpose of this chapter, emotion rather than affect seems to be the more appropriate to my analysis of the feedback loop between the drama production staff and the viewers.

As with the English word "emotion," *gam-jeong* and *gam-dong* are gendered notions in Korea: they are associated with femininity, while logical thinking is associated with masculinity (reinforcing the false binary of logic versus emotion). Therefore, as I will elaborate shortly, Korean television dramas are feminized in Korean social discourse. Their feminized emotionality makes them targets for maligning and trivializing. Nonetheless, they are vital to the transnational popularity of Korean television dramas.

Hallyu: An Afterthought?

Until the success of Hallyu, both the labor of Korean television drama script writing and the emotional response Korean television dramas create in their viewers were dismissed by dominant discourses about popular culture. A drama writer Jung Ha-Yun said,

> People nowadays don't necessarily think television dramas are subservient to novels but even as recently as ten years ago, if I said I write dramas for a living, people would say 'He writes dramas because he doesn't have the ability to write novels'. Nowadays, when I say I write dramas, people say 'Oh really?' and take photos with me and get my autograph (Jung 2007).

The status of television dramas within Korea changed dramatically due to the transnational popularity of Korean dramas.

Advances in digital technology are central to the transnational dissemination of Korean television dramas (Kim 2013c). Through internet streaming websites and online Korean drama fan forums, transnational viewers of Korean television dramas imagine different forms of intimacy, romantic love, and masculinity. As I analyze in Chapter 4, viewers of Korean television dramas comment and share their desires with other viewers all over the world through online fan forums and other digital spaces related to Hallyu. Online streaming through laptops and smartphones has created new forms of (transnational) intimacy for these viewers. If televisions were once considered more private technology compared to cinema, today, laptops and smartphone screens serve as even more private forms of visual entertainment. Especially in the current era when televisions are increasingly becoming wider and bigger and, ostensibly, more "cinematic," the small screens of laptops and cellphones are becoming the new form of personal

television especially for the younger generation of viewers (Creeber 2011). They are the new forms of intimate screens. New media are associated with notions of privacy and intimacy; they are objects through which viewers can replay their favorite romantic drama scenes.

To adapt to the transnational popularity of Korean television dramas and the new methods through which these viewers consume Korean television dramas, Korean corporations have been researching ways that they could include cellphone-viewing and viral video streaming counts into the Nielson ratings equation (Oh 2015b). However, such efforts to include the transnational viewers into the Nielson ratings have not been productive because Korean newspapers and marketing agencies still use traditional Nielson ratings to measure the success of Korean television dramas. In essence, from the point of view of the Korean television drama production staff, getting high Nielson ratings from Korean television viewers is essential to their survival. I use the rather dramatic term "survival" because Nielson ratings of television dramas are directly related to whether drama production staff get paid for their labor. In other words, whether Korean television viewers consume their dramas are directly correlated with the production staffs' livelihood. Transnational viewership does not count towards traditional Nielson ratings and this is one of many reasons that the drama production staff claim they do not care about transnational viewers of Korean television dramas.

In the Korean television drama production environment, where there is a very limited power of trade unions, the production staff are often mired in unequal and unfair contracts whereby their incomes are not guaranteed unless the dramas they work on achieve financial success. Nielson ratings are vital to the Korean television drama production staff because the broadcasting industry uses high ratings not only as measures of dramas' popularity but also as a means of dictating the price of the advertisement slots. Consequently, the ratings of dramas are

essential to determining whether production staff can continue making their dramas and get paid. The Korean broadcasting industry's narrow focus on Nielson ratings complicates ways that Korean drama production staff conceptualize transnational viewers of Korean television dramas.

When asked about the transnational popularity of one of her dramas, Korean television drama scriptwriter Ku responded, "Oh is that so? I don't know about that kind of transnational export business" (Ku 2012). Similarly, another television drama scriptwriter, responded, "To be honest, when I was thinking of the drama, I did not even think about whether it will be popular overseas. When I write dramas, I focus on whether my dramas emotionally resonate with Korean viewers, not Hallyu" (Kim 2010a). Transnationalism and transnational media have problematized the binary categorization of the local and the transnational; yet, the above-mentioned Korean television drama script writers adhered to such binary distinctions between local viewers and transnational viewers. According to both script writers, the transnational popularity of their dramas was happenstance as opposed to something that happened through meticulous planning on their part.

According to one television drama producer whom I interviewed, Korean television drama production companies and broadcasting corporations thrive off of selling advertisement slots for the dramas. To my surprise, the producer whom I interviewed stated that the profit from the transnational popularity of Korean dramas is small compared to the amount of money that could be made through selling advertisement slots and through the sale of items that appeared in the television dramas. I was surprised by this statement because research indicates that Korean companies make billions of dollars annually due to the transnational popularity of Korean television dramas (KOFICE 2019). Considering its profitability, I thought the people involved with making Korean television dramas would pay more attention to Hallyu and the transnational

viewers of the dramas. On the contrary, Korean television drama production staff whom I interviewed and whose archived interviews I analyzed resolutely asserted that they produced Korean television dramas for *Korean* viewers and that the transnational popularity of particular dramas were byproducts of those dramas' local popularity. Their discourse resonated with a popular Korean adage that, "What is most Korean is the most global."[9] This kind of discourse is based on a belief that "Korean culture" (whatever it means at a given time) is transnationally appealing in its original form and that Koreans should not alter Korean culture to cater to foreign taste. In the context of Korean television drama production, such discourse implies that if a television drama is popular among Korean viewers it will also be popular among transnational viewers.

I found some scriptwriters even complaining that paying attention to the transnational viewers of Korean television dramas turns Korean television dramas into inferior-quality products. *Saimdang: Memoir of Color (2017)* is a drama about one of Korea's most famous and talented female scholars. The show was expected to be popular because it starred the actress Lee Young-Ae who played the heroine in *The Jewel in the Palace (2003)*, a drama that experienced resounding success nationally and around the world. Considering that *Jewel in the Palace* experienced a resounding transnational success beyond Asia, Lee's come-back to television after her decade-long hiatus was expected to automatically make the drama a Hallyu sensation.[10] The program was fully pre-produced (i.e. all of the episodes were filmed and edited months before the official air date) and the episodes were scheduled to air simultaneously in Korea and China.

[9] Former Korean president Kim Young Sam said this statement in the 1990s. At that time, Kim was trying to stir up national pride among Korean citizens, especially among those who were arguing that Korea needed to drastically alter or discard its traditional culture in order to become a globalized nation.

[10] Since her performance in *The Jewel in the Palace* (2003), she did not star in any other television drama until *Saimdang: Memoir of Color (2017)*.

However, according to the show's script writer, in an effort to make the drama transnationally popular, the production staff had to pay inordinate amount of attention to anticipating the assumed desires of the Chinese viewers. Park, the scriptwriter for the drama claimed that these futile efforts to cater to Chinese viewers ruined the television program:

> The drama was pre-produced with an ambitious desire to broadcast it in two countries simultaneously. However, editing the script without viewer feedback was like walking in darkness. Moreover, because of the THAAD missile crisis,[11] China and Korea's foreign relations worsened and the simultaneous broadcasting schedule was pushed back. Many people anticipated this drama was going to be profitable. I think the problem was that there were so many people who saw this drama as a figurative lottery to turn their fortunes around. It was really hard to write scripts that I wanted to write. During the filming and editing process, all the important lines and scenes were cut to cater to the whims of all the business interests that invested in the drama because they anticipated that it was going to be a Hallyu drama. Scripts that I never wrote were dubbed into the drama […] I just let it slide but I begged the production company to keep the ending the way I wrote it and the producer gave me his word, but in the end, the finale was different from the script I wrote. I am the writer who has my name attached to the drama and I tried really hard to write a good drama but some unknown ghostwriter was ripping up and editing my scripts. In these cases, the viewers

[11] US military in Korea planned to bring THAAD missile defense system to Korea in order to protect the US from North Korean nuclear weapons. However, China protested such plans by arguing that THAAD's radar system could be used by the US to spy on China. South Korea was diplomatically stuck between the two super powers. China protested by preventing import of Hallyu products.

> cannot find the drama appealing because the emotional (*gam-jeong*) tone of the drama is inconsistent (Park 2017).

According to Park, the drama failed because the drama production staff were being too ambitious with wanting to make a transnationally popular drama. Park claimed the failure of the drama was in large part due to the production staff paying too much attention to catering to the assumed desires of transnational viewers when they should have been paying more attention to its local success.

I agree with Park's argument regarding the futility of attempting to guess transnational viewers' desires and trying to cater to them. It is misguided to assume that there is a monolithic "transnational viewers' desire" that Korean television drama production staff can cater towards. Transnational viewers of Korean television dramas will consume and interpret the television dramas in heterogeneous ways. For instance, scholars note that Chinese women relate to Korean drama's depictions of love by interpreting them through the Chinese perspective of love called "qing"; to them, Korean television dramas depict the types of love and intimacy that they feel are lost in their culture due to rapid modernization (Lin and Tong 2008). Scholars also note how some Chinese women fantasize about Korean stars because they exemplify romantic freedom that young Chinese women aspire to find within themselves (Pease 2009). Similarly, Malaysian women relate to Korean dramas, despite the dramas being largely ignorant and non-representative of Muslim culture, because they feel emotionally connected to the dramas and empathize with the female protagonists of the dramas (Hudson and Azalanshah 2014). Transnational viewers of Korean television dramas interpret the intimacy and masculinity depicted in the dramas through their own culturally inflected points of view. Likewise, a

monolithic conception of "Korean viewers' desires" does not exist either. Korean television drama viewers' desires are as heterogeneous as those of transnational viewers. However, the Korean television drama production staff, whom I interviewed and whose archived interviews I analyzed, resolutely adhered to the binary discourse of national versus transnational audiences. In the following sections, I will analyze how the production staff's binary discourses of national and transnational media are closely entwined with "live" production, a unique method of Korean television drama production.

"Live" Production and the Importance of a Feedback Loop

Viewer feedback is central to the production of Korean television dramas. To garner high ratings, programs have to successfully process feedback from the viewers and apply them in producing upcoming episodes of the television dramas. This creates an environment where Korean television dramas are filmed and produced under very tight schedules to cater to viewers' feedback. In Korea, such style of production is called "live" production: this refers to methods of production whereby the staff finish the filming and editing of a television drama's episode only a few hours (or even a few minutes) before its scheduled air time. The opposite of "live" production is pre-production which refers to a production style whereby most of the drama is filmed and edited months in advance of the date of the airing of its first episode. Recently, pre-production is trending in the television drama production business; still, a majority of the Korean dramas maintain their near "live" production style because they value immediate feedback from the viewers. How do transnational Hallyu fans factor into such equation? Are they able to participate in the feedback loop between the television production staff and the viewers?

National (Korean) audiences and their opinions and feedback are crucial to drama

production because viewers' feedback has to be immediately incorporated into the production. Yujeong Oh (2015c) notes the significance of interactions between Korean show producers/writers and Korean viewers. Through ethnographic observation of Korean television drama production staff and the Korean viewers, Oh claims that one of the pleasures Korean viewers find in Korean television dramas is "interactive pleasure." The pleasures of consuming Korean television dramas involve sharing one's intimate emotions of love with other fans as well as with the television drama production crew. The production staff prove their interactivity with the fans by altering the shows' finale or even the plot based on popular fantasies of love and desire circulating among its online fan communities. According to Oh, one could argue that the Korean television dramas are co-produced by the production crew and the Korean viewers of these dramas. In this sense, Korean television dramas are projects that build upon multilateral desires and demands for immediate feedback. Evidently, the production staff use the binary discourse of national versus transnational because of the production culture of these dramas rely on incorporating national viewers' feedback into the production of these dramas.

Choi, a Korean drama writer posits: "In current Korean production practice, for mini-series, the maximum you can write before the drama begins airing is eight episodes worth of script but, in reality, it is more like four episodes" (Choi 2005). Since Korean dramas air two episodes per week, to have only four episodes' worth of scripts prepared means that the writers have only two weeks' worth of scripts pre-produced and have to write the rest of a sixteen to twenty-four-episode drama as it is airing. Such a hectic work environment caused numerous accidents on Korean television drama sets where rushed actors and workers on set were seriously injured during filming. In one instance, an actress ran away from the set in the middle of filming because she could not bear the horrible work environment where she received scripts line by line

on her phone as she acted since the scriptwriter could not finish the script in time for the filming. Several times, program editors received copies of the shows only a few hours before the air-time which meant they did not have enough time to thoroughly edit the shows before airing. As a result, parts of such episodes mistakenly aired without any sound, or the episodes ended abruptly while they were airing because of editing mistakes caused by lack of time.[12]

The hectic and accident-prone Korean television drama production environment has led many industry personnel to contrast Korean production style to that of Hollywood's which they deem to be much more professional and logical. In books written by Korean television drama production personnel and in interviews, they compare Korean television drama production with that of US television shows. For example, in his book *What are the Differences between American and Korean TV Drama Series? TV Drama Production Environment in America and Korea*, Konshik Yu (Yu 2013) suggests that Korean production should emulate more practical methods employed by Hollywood drama production staff. The "practical methods employed by Hollywood" refers to production culture ranging from guaranteed wages for production staff to advanced planning and filming of television dramas. Similarly, one drama writer Choi Ran said,

> It was hard writing a drama but more than it being difficult, it was upsetting. I wrote eight episodes before broadcasting but they ended up only filming two episodes before broadcast. If we had more time, we could have made a more quality drama. Some people ask me if I gave *jjokdaebon*. But I swear I did no such thing. Some people also say 'Why can't you write like Hollywood dramas?' and I say to them 'If you put me in a Hollywood system, I can write that way.' In

[12] For instance, *A Korean Odyssey* (2017) suddenly stopped broadcasting half-way through the second episode because the staff could not edit the dramas in time.

> such live production system, it is a miracle that our production team and staff pulled off even this decent quality of a drama (Choi 2014).

Jjokdaebon refers to piecemeal scripts whereby the television drama crew and actors do not get a script in advance in a book format but get the script line by line as the author writes the script almost in "real-time" as the actors and crew are filming. These piecemeal scripts make it impossible for production staff to plan reasonable shooting schedules or for actors to thoroughly understand their characters. However, these piecemeal scripts are major components of Korean drama production because they enable the production staff to easily incorporate viewers' feedback and alter the script.

The production staff whom I interviewed pointed to the presence of immediate feedback between the viewers and the scriptwriters as the primary reason that Korean television dramas are popular nationally and around the world. According to these production staff, "live" production gives these dramas better chances to be successful because they are essentially crowd-sourcing for storylines and character development from thousands of viewers who tune-in to watch Korean television dramas. In the US, a team of scriptwriters work together to write scripts for a television drama but in Korea scriptwriters work alone or with only a couple of assistants. Viewer feedback provides these Korean scriptwriters with some assurance and/or guidance regarding the future direction of their scripts. With few exceptions, pre-produced Korean television dramas have not achieved success comparable to that of the dramas that were "live-produced." This is despite the fact that pre-produced dramas amass exorbitant funding, media attention, and feature top celebrities.[13]

[13] Examples of pre-produced dramas that failed to garner high Nielson ratings are *Uncontrollably Fond* (2016) featuring top stars Kim Woo Bin and Suzy and *Saimdang, Memoir of Color* (2017) starring Hallyu

Through "live" production, television drama scriptwriters can benefit from knowing which characters the viewers love and which emotions the viewers desire to see more in their television dramas. The writers rely heavily on immediate feedback from Korean viewers. According to Ha, a popular Korean drama scriptwriter:

> This one character in my drama became much more popular than I anticipated. The viewers loved the character so much that I could not possibly make him out to be the pure evil character that I intended him to be at first. He needed to become a good husband and in order to make his character stand out, other characters had to be sacrificed. Dramas are like that, even if I anticipate every viewer reaction beforehand, it is never quite the same. Dramas are malleable like that (Ha 2013).

The near-real-time interaction between the scriptwriter and the viewers create a feedback loop. Such dynamic reverses the notion that viewers only react to and interpret television dramas after the fact that it was completely filmed and prepared for broadcasting. Korean viewers are active participants in the production of Korean television dramas; they can alter the plot of some television dramas through their feedback.

Here, the immediacy of the feedback is essential because viewers' feedback is incorporated into the script in the very next episode to boost ratings. Some Korean television industry personnel even go as far as to say,

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icons Lee Yong-Ae and Song Seung Hun.

> Even if China devotes all its China [sic] money to producing quality national dramas, they cannot make something akin to Korean dramas. In China, all the dramas have to be screened by government beforehand so they have to be pre-produced months before airing. But in Korea, we analyze viewer reactions minute by minute and have the finesse and skills to alter the script according to data about when viewers tuned into the drama and when they changed the channel. In essence, all Koreans are witnesses, writers, and producers of Korean television dramas (Oh 2015b).

I disagree with Oh's claim that China cannot make quality television dramas just because the dramas must be pre-produced for government approval. However, I do agree with his argument that Korean television dramas are co-produced through feedback loops between the television drama production staff and the viewers. The feedback comes in various forms. As Oh mentions, feedback sometimes refers to minute-by-minute data noting when viewers tuned into a drama and when they changed channels. Feedbacks also refer to comments that viewers write on online fan forums frequented by Korean television drama production staff.

However, such a feedback loop between Korean television drama production staff and viewers is primarily accessible to a group of viewers whom the production staffs call "Korean viewers." In the era of instantaneous global communications, the distinction between domestic and international is becoming less demarcated, but these binary discourses still exist when it comes to Korean television dramas because of business interests. As I briefly mentioned above, the production companies of some Korean television dramas, such as that of *Saimdang: Story of Light*, sign business deals with foreign (mostly East Asian) broadcasting corporations to air the

television drama simultaneously in Korea and abroad. In these rare cases, transnational viewers do not have to wait for Korean television dramas to be subtitled, edited, and scheduled for broadcast in their country to watch these dramas. Nor do they have to depend on pirated versions. However, apart from these few exceptions, transnational viewers of Korean television dramas have to either pirate the dramas online or wait a few days to a few months for these dramas to be legally available in their countries to watch Korean television dramas. In effect, in many cases, transnational viewers are only able to legally access Korean television dramas after they have been made available to viewers living in Korea. Due to the "live" production style of Korean television dramas, even those few days to a few months of delay mean that transnational viewers do not get their chance to provide feedback to the drama production staff in time for their feedback to be incorporated into television dramas that they are watching.

Production staff with whom I worked claimed that they would prefer to have their dramas achieve immediate success among Korean viewers rather than have the dramas transnational popularity in the distant future. When I asked Yoon, a Korean television drama producer, about his thoughts on the transnational popularity of Korean television dramas, he claimed, "What matters is the local audience. Even if Hallyu brings benefits, those benefits are not guaranteed or immediate as opposed to the profit from national advertisements." Profits from television dramas need to be immediate to pay the production staffs' wages. "Live" production, despite being hazardous and risky, is still the common practice of Korean drama production because the plot malleability associated with "live" production ensures the greatest success of these dramas among Korean viewers. To pay all the workers and investors involved in the production, producers must rely heavily on the immediate feedback of local audiences rather than anticipate the future success of the shows among transnational viewers of Korean television dramas.

One Korean television drama scriptwriter stated, “Writers cannot tell their stories if their dramas have low ratings” (Choi 2009). Sohn Young Mok (Sohn 2013), a scriptwriter, said,

> I did not pay attention to the ratings until my recent drama *President* failed but after that I thought ‘This is not good!’ I wrote a couple of dramas that failed miserably to the point that could not pay the staff. The television drama that I wrote, entitled *President*, has the biggest amount of unpaid wages of all my dramas. When a drama fails, the staff that worked night and day for several months just do not get paid. I felt immense sense of dismay that because of my failure, three hundred staff were not getting paid for their hard work. If a drama fails, it isn’t just me who has to suffer but the production companies go in debt and the families of all the drama staff go hungry so now I think ‘rating is god’ and I religiously rely on viewer feedback and ratings.

The immediate feedback provided by local viewers in Korea is essential to the literal and figurative survival of the drama production staff. In the case of Korean dramas, viewers’ feedback is directly linked to the survival of hundreds of people working for Korean television drama production. The evaluations of the emotions and fantasies created by production staff are based on viewer ratings, and ratings become the basis of the television production staffs’ wages. This emphasis on ratings reinforces the binary discourse of the production staff who claim to prioritize the national/local audience over transnational viewers of Korean television dramas. In the next section, I analyze how the production staff gender the feedback loop between Korean television drama scriptwriters and viewers on top of nationalizing the viewers.

Gendering (and Nationalizing) Viewers of Korean Television Dramas

Many of the scriptwriters who were interviewed for the script writer's union project described the imputed viewers of Korean television dramas in gendered and nationalist terms. These drama scriptwriters claimed that they wrote television dramas to cater to the erotic desires of "Korean women." I disagree with their assumption that "Korean women" is a monolithic group that shares the same erotic desires and fantasies or that they interpret television dramas in homogeneous ways. Nonetheless, I found that the scriptwriters who were interviewed for the union project ascribed to notion that Korean women viewers are a monolithic entity. For instance, scriptwriter Jung Hyun Jung said:

> My cable drama *I Need Romance* became a big hit. When I was preparing season two of *I Need Romance*, the producer said I should watch *Sex and the City* Season two. I watched a few episodes and I liked the character Charlotte but my assistant writers in their twenties said they thought Samantha was the best character in the show. When I heard them say that, I looked up a lot of stuff on young Korean women's lives. I went to young women's communities, subscribed to trendy magazines and all that because I am so far removed from them in real life. I realized that there are indeed so many young Korean women who desire to be like Samantha. I thought that their erotic desires and romantic practices are so different than my own experience that I needed to adjust to the shift in Korean women's erotic desires and practices in order to write dramas that are more relatable to these new

generation of Korean women (Jung 2014).

What does Jung mean by "the shift in Korean women's erotic desires and practices"?

Through her conversation with a group of young Korean women, Jung sensed a dissonance between her conception of female sexuality and that of young Korean women whom she talked to. Based on this conversation, Jung extrapolated from the opinions of a few young Korean women and assumed that all young Korean women in the contemporary era are more sexual compared to Korean women back in the day. This assumption is a broad generalization of Korean women's sexuality because not all young Korean women in the twenty-first century are sexually expressive and nor were Korean women sexually repressed in the past. However, Jung interpreted the difference of opinion between herself and younger Korean women she talked to as a sign of her own inability to keep up with the changing discourse of "acceptable" Korean feminine sexuality. Rather than interpreting the difference of opinion between her and the young Korean women she talked to as merely that, a difference in opinion, Jung claimed that she worked to change her own perspective in order to cater to what she perceived to be the changing erotic fantasies of young Korean female audience of Korean television dramas. Keeping up with changes in so-called "Korean women's erotic desires and practices" was important to Jung because she assumed that Korean women were the main audience for the television dramas she produced.

Although viewers of Korean television dramas are heterogeneous, popular discourse in Korea defines them as feminine and Korean television dramas as feminine genres. For instance, in Korea, popular and sensationalist discourses such as those about "Cinderella complex" pathologizes Korean women by suggesting that these women over-consume Korean television

drama and fantasize about themselves as Cinderella whose prince will soon come to save them in "real life." According to these discourses, women are the only ones who watch Korean television dramas and become nonsensical beings with a tenuous grasp of reality.

This critique of Korean television dramas and their female viewers is based on criticism of the sense of "escape" that is associated with the pleasures of watching Korean television dramas. One of my Korean women informants claimed she "watched the dramas to experience what I cannot in real life." This statement resonates with how women in Janice Radway's (1984) study on romance novels said they read romance novels to "escape" from the "ordinary" and the "everyday" experiences. Based on my conversations and observations of Korean women with whom I did my fieldwork, they watched Korean television dramas to see how romantic relationships worked in the utopian world of Korean television dramas in ways that diverged from their experiences of dating Korean men in "real life." Although a part of the attraction of Korean television dramas for Korean women lies in the sense of "escape," the assumption that these women are "escapists" who have lost touch with reality is inaccurate. These women were using the television dramas to envision ways that intimate relationships in "real life" could be fixed to become more "ideal." As I discuss more at length in Chapter 5, these women's mobilization of Korean television dramas in relation to "real life" romantic relationships were different from how my Hallyu tourist informants claimed to mobilize Korean television dramas to find love. Here, I need to acknowledge that despite arguing that viewers of Korean television dramas are heterogeneous, most of the Korean television drama viewers I interviewed (Korean and foreign) identified as women.

Some scholars argue that television melodramas and soap operas are indeed "women's genres." Referencing the widely-cited piece written by Laura Mulvey (1975) on cinema and the

male gaze, scholars of US soap operas emphasize the difference between cinema and television particularly with regard to how they portray women. According to Mulvey, women appear on screen to interrupt the flow of the narrative; they are visual place-holders whose existences serve to visually please heterosexual men. In other words, according to Mulvey, women on screen become more akin to scenery than characters. According to some feminist media scholars, soap operas do not objectify women to the same extent as cinema and are thereby relatively feminine in the pleasures they create (Flitterman-Lewis 1992, Kuhn 1999). The spatial placement of the television within the domestic sphere (Brunsdon 2005), as well as the gendered viewership of television soap operas and melodramas also contribute to the perception of television melodramas and soap operas as women's genres.

I do not necessarily agree with the claim that television dramas – more specifically Korean television dramas – are women's genres and that they create feminine pleasures. "Feminine pleasure" is an ambiguous term. As Lauren Berlant (2008) argues, to assume there is some form of homogenous femininity and shared feminine desires leads to essentialist interpretations of womanhood. Even though women who share the common denominator of Korean ethnicity may experience similar trials and tribulations, they are heterogeneous individuals with their own sets of erotic desires and fantasies. Nancy Abelman (2003) argues that, Korean women would constantly use melodramatic Korean films and television programs to describe their life-events. According to Abelman, her Korean female informants constantly drew parallels between well-known Korean television dramas/films and their lives, to the point that Abelman found these women's personal narratives and Korean melodramatic television programs/films virtually inseparable. However, these women interpreted and drew parallels between their lives and the media in divergent ways.

Korean television dramas draw viewers of all genders. JungBong Choi (2011) has argued that, similar to the function of newspapers in the past (referring to Benedict Anderson's (2006) theorization of nations as imagined communities), notable national films and television dramas become part of national mass culture that bind people of all genders and backgrounds within the concept of nationhood. According to Choi, "It is an experience not simply of the textual and representational but also of the social and institutional" (Choi 2011, 185). I do not agree with Choi's argument in its entirety, transnational media may resonate more with some viewers than the so-called national media. However, I do agree with Choi's argument that certain "national" films and television programs create "institutional" discourses and culture of obsession pertaining to these entertainments that impact individuals residing in Korea regardless of their gender.

To extrapolate, Korean television dramas become embedded within the everyday lives of Koreans living in Korea. Notable Korean dramas such as *Sandglass* (1995), *Jewel in the Palace* (2003), *Queen Seondeok* (2009), *My Love from Another Star* (2013), and *Descendants of the Sun* (2016) that garnered high Nielson ratings ranging from 20% to 60% became significant components of everyday life in Korea during and after they aired on Korean television networks. During my field research, I observed the extent to which popular Korean television dramas became cultural obsessions in major cities like Seoul. For instance, Korean government sectors such as the Seoul Metro (the organization that oversees the operation of Seoul subway systems) incorporated images and tropes from popular Korean television dramas in their public service announcements. The Seoul Metro utilized *Descendants of the Sun's* hero Yu Shi-Jin's image and his dialect in their public service announcement posters. These posters depicted caricatures of Yu in his military uniform and aviator sunglasses holding out his right hand in front of him with his

palms facing the front and his left hand resting on his hips. A small text bubble next to him informs viewers of the acts in which they should not engage while riding the metro. These warnings were written in the militaristic dialect which Yu's character used throughout the television drama. These posters were plastered in all the subway cars during and after the airing of the television show. The images and the narratives from the television drama became a part of the daily lives of people who used the Seoul subway system. These posters were not specifically directed towards Korean women; anyone who rode the subway were surrounded by these television drama-inspired posters.

A snapshot of the cityscape during and in the immediate aftermath of the airing of the drama *Descendants of the Sun*'s in South Korea shows how the drama became an object of cultural obsession in Seoul (and more broadly, in Korea at large) that transcended its status as a televisual entertainment discursively categorized and stigmatized as feminine entertainment. I conducted my ethnographic research in Korea a few months after the drama *Descendants of the Sun* aired in Korea. As I walked around Seoul with the Hallyu tourists with whom I did my fieldwork, we were inundated with images and contents derived from the drama. As I mentioned above, the Seoul subway trains we rode every day had public service announcement posters that used images and phrases derived from the drama. Franchise restaurants and coffee shops that were featured in the drama plastered gigantic posters on their storefront to advertise their affiliation with the drama and to encourage customers to try the menu that the characters in the drama ordered. Jewelry stores and clothing stores would sell knock-off versions of the necklace and clothing featured in the drama. To me, it felt that every other billboard and advertisement in subway stations and on the streets featured the actors who performed in the drama. Some of these posters and billboard signs were advertisements for particular products while others were

created by fans of the drama who designed the posters, gathered money for the billboard spot, and displayed their love for the drama in public places through these billboards and posters. These billboards would simply consist of beautiful images of the actors and a simple line of appreciation from the fans that read something along the lines of, "Thank you for being born. We love you." Walking on the busy street lined with various shops that sell clothes, cell phones, jewelry, food, and coffee, I would hear the dramas' theme songs blaring from many of the shops on the street. Especially during the summer, shops would keep their doors open to invite customers into their shop and the theme songs of *Descendants of the Sun* that different shops were playing in the background would all blend to make the street sound like a scene from the television drama. Whether I was sitting in a coffee shop, walking along the busy shopping district with Hallyu tourist informants, or riding the subway, I felt visually and aurally immersed in a world inflected by the drama. Regardless of whether or not one watched the drama, individuals living in big Korean cities like Seoul were inundated with the cultural phenomenon that derived from *Descendants of the Sun*. One could not escape from the drama unless one went out of one's way to avoid it. What I just described does not just apply to the drama *Descendants of the Sun* but was true of several other dramas; nor was Seoul the only city affected by popular television dramas.

The same kind of cultural obsession swept through various large and small Korean cities whenever a particular drama gained popularity in Korea. When the television drama *Guardian: Lonely and Great God* became popular, even my small hometown (infinitesimally smaller than Seoul) was also swept up in the hype related to the television drama. A memorable scene in the drama was filmed on the seashore of my hometown so it became a popular tourist destination. The usually quiet fishing village was bombarded with tourists from all over Korea and around

the world. Cars and people lined the narrow streets and villagers in need of money set up shops around the area to profit from the craze created by the drama. Considering how pervasive the impact of Korean television dramas is on Korean culture at large, why do Korean cultural discourse define Korean television dramas and their viewers as strictly feminine?

I suggest that the Korean television production staff, as well as certain Korean cultural discourse, define Korean television dramas and their viewers as feminine because the television dramas stir visceral emotional reactions in their viewers. Based on the discourse of Korean heteropatriarchal masculinity, being emotional is associated with femininity and weakness. Since the time they are young boys, Korean boys are told not to cry because it makes them effeminate and weak. An adage in Korea claims that Korean men should only cry three times in their lives: when they are born, when their parents pass away, and when they lose their nation. As I discuss at length in Chapters 1 and 2, I define the majority of Korean television dramas as melodramas that focus on emotionality. According to Christine Gledhill (1992), "In melodrama what people feel and do, how they relate to each other, is of utmost consequence—the source of meaning, the justification for human action" (108). Such emotionality is unacceptable according to discourses of Korean heteropatriarchal masculinity. Furthermore, from this perspective, television dramas are problematic and perhaps even "dangerous" because they portray flower boy masculinity that contests Korean heteropatriarchal masculinity.

Korean popular discourse that categorizes Korean television dramas as feminine entertainment is so pervasive that some Korean drama production staff also echo such gendered discourses about Korean television dramas and their viewers. For example, producer Kim Jong Shik (who happens to be male) complained "Korean dramas, just like Korean society, lack diversity. The only dramas that exist right now are ones aimed towards *ajummas*. There are no

other genres to speak of" (Kim 2006).[14] Kim describes Korean television dramas as not only women's genre but as a form of entertainment aimed towards trivial and vulgar *Korean* women (as indicated by his use of the term *ajumma* which primarily refers to ethnic Korean women).

Similarly, a Korean drama scriptwriter Cho Jung Sun explained:

> I despise the term '*Chungdamdong* daughter-in-law'[15]. What on earth is a *Chungdamdong* daughter-in-law anyways? Growing up in times like this, women need to work to change the image of femininity rather than be complicit in it. I have so much anger in my heart about the fact that such images become role models for young Korean women. When my mother was young, women were considered well-educated if they graduated high school. My mom gave me many opportunities for education because she thought if I was educated and cultured I will be respected in society. I studied as mom told me. I thought the society would provide women with a fair chance in life if they get enough education. But I realized when I was of marriage age that neither the mother-in-laws, the husbands, nor societal perceptions of women changed one bit from when my mother was growing up. Still, women were objects who had to marry into rich families and be subservient to their in-laws and husbands. I was angry about that and wanted to use the dramas to

[14] *Ajumma* is a Korean term that refers to older married women of Korean ethnicity. The term is often used in a derogatory manner to refer to Korean women who do not take care of their appearances, are loud and opinionated yet ignorant in matters of "worldly significance." They are stereotyped in Korean society as vulgar, crude, and trivial.

[15] Chungdamdong is a wealthy district in Seoul, Korea. The neighborhood is often associated with an elite and rich lifestyle. Consequently, Chungdamdong daughter-in-law refers to Cinderella-esque women who marry into rich families who live in rich neighborhoods like Chungdamdong. They are an aspiration for some young Korean women and their parents. An English equivalent would be "gold-digger."

> portray the so called '*Chungdamdong* women' and the limitations of that lifestyle to women's happiness (Cho 2013).

Cho claims that she wants to write television drama scripts that problematize the everyday sexism that she and her mother, as well as young Korean women at large (whatever that means in this context), face in Korea. In this regard, Cho also adheres to the assumption that Korean television dramas are entertainment for Korean women. At the same time, for her, the dramas are not just feminine entertainment that *reflects* Korean women's everyday struggles but also tools that could *challenge* popular discourses of Korean femininity. Rather than perpetuating the sexist norms that women should be domestic, docile, and subservient wives, Cho sees her television dramas as entertainment that challenges such assumptions. Cho's discourse indicates that she believes her dramas shape and are shaped by Korean viewers. Based on Cho's discourse, Korean television dramas do not just cater to viewers' desires; they are shaped by and at the same time shape viewers' erotic desires in a form of feedback loop. Much like other Korean television drama producers and scriptwriters, Cho also does not mention or take into account the transnational viewers of Korean television dramas and how her television dramas influence and at the same time are influenced by transnational viewers of Korean television dramas.

Thus far in this chapter, I argued that "Korean women" as a category is ambiguous: those who identify as Korean women do not share homogeneous erotic fantasies and desires. Likewise, Hallyu fans of Korean television dramas whom I worked with were also a heterogeneous group of viewers with disparate erotic desires. Admittedly, all of the Hallyu tourists whom I worked with were women (most of them identifying as white women) who traveled to Korea to form intimate relations with Korean men in "real life," and in this regard, they may have shared some

similar traits. Most of the Hallyu tourists with whom I worked desired to form intimate relations with Korean men whom they described as "flower boys" or "soft" men. However, my informants did not all pursue the same type of Korean men: some of my informants described their ideal Korean man as someone sporty while others claimed they wanted artistic and thin men. Some viewers of Korean television drama claimed that they explicitly derived pleasure from watching hot Korean men in the dramas while others claimed they enjoyed the emotions conveyed through Korean television dramas. For example, I was sitting on a sofa in the hostel living room with a Hallyu tourist from Russia when a woman from China sporting chin-length hair walked in and sat on the couch adjacent to us. For a few minutes, she listened to our conversation but then she interjected in the interview when my informant talked about how much pleasure she derived from watching Korean dramas. The Chinese woman (whom I did not get a chance to talk to or get acquainted with) said, "You get pleasure from watching Korean dramas? I guess it makes sense that people get some pleasure out of it, but you know how weak and fragile the female characters are in Korean television dramas. In my opinion, the dramas are nothing but porn. Women just watch dramas to see hot men." My informant protested, "I don't think it is porn. I think it is…" But without letting my informant finish her sentence, the Chinese woman got up from the sofa and left. My informant and I stared at each other with incredulity at what just transpired. The Chinese woman's critique of Korean dramas hinged on two axes. First, she critiqued the weak female characters in the dramas; according to her, the only positive aspect about the dramas were the "hot men." However, she also argued that the dramas with their "hot men" are "nothing but porn," from which I deduce she meant that the dramas – like porn – are negligible fantasies devoid of realistic value. In effect, she trivialized both pornography and television dramas – both of which Linda Williams (1991) calls "body genres" due to the visceral

corporeal reactions they elicit in their viewers. Thus, not all women have similar interpretations or reactions to Korean television dramas.

Due to linguistic barriers, transnational viewers of Korean television dramas are not able to participate in the feedback loop between the television drama production staff and the viewers. Nonetheless, they still consume, enjoy, and connect with Korean television dramas by "emotionally understanding" these dramas. Some transnational Hallyu fans who watch Korean television dramas say they "emotionally understand" the dramas even when they watch the dramas without subtitles. Media studies literature on the haptic and kinaesthetic pleasures of cinema/television insist that televisual narratives are not just visual (Sobchack 2004). Linda Williams (1991) refers to melodramas as "body genres" because they create visceral corporeal reactions in the viewers. According to Williams, viewers jolt, shiver, shed tears, and sweat in response to the visual media that they consume. Furthermore, Mankekar (2013) notes how television programs work to overcome their sensorial limitations by actively encouraging viewers to imagine the crisp texture of food through the aural sensations conveyed through television audio. In such regards, transnational viewers of Korean television dramas have visceral corporeal reactions to the Korean television dramas that they consume.

However, as I analyzed in this chapter, the Korean drama production staff whom I worked with and whose archived interviews I analyzed, differentiated between transnational (Hallyu) and the national audience due to the production environment of Korean television dramas which demand immediate success in obtaining high Nielson Ratings and profit margins. These production staff described the transnational popularity of Korean television dramas as happenstance and the "transnational" viewers as byproducts of such happenstance. These production staff paid little regard for the transnational viewers of Korean television dramas

because they are unable to partake in the feedback loop between the production staff and the viewers that leads to high ratings and immediate profit for the production staff. Meanwhile, these production staff described "national" viewers in terms of discourses of collaboration: they claimed that the production staff and the Korean viewers collaborated through their feedback to enable them to create well-made and emotionally resonant television dramas.

Conclusion

Korean television scriptwriters, as evident in their archived interviews, described Korean television dramas as entertainment genres mainly formed for and by Korean women. The scriptwriters claimed viewers' feedbacks are critical to Korean drama production. The Korean television drama business relies on a chain reaction of events that begin with effective translation of viewers' desires into televisual entertainment. The success of the feedback loop between Korean television drama production staff and the viewers is measured by the Nielson ratings. The logic here is that the more successful the television dramas are in emotionally touching their viewers, the higher the ratings will be, and the advertisement slots will become more expensive, which means the broadcasting corporations will earn more profit from the dramas. Many of the production staff appeared to rely on their subjective understanding of what "Korean women" implied based on who could provide them with timely feedback about their dramas in ways that will help the dramas achieve high Nielson ratings.

Due to the "live production" style of Korean dramas, the transnational popularity of the dramas is treated as an epiphenomenon to the success of the shows on the national level. In the midst of the transnational phenomenon of Hallyu, Korean television drama production still appeared to revolve around the concept of the national media and national audience. In the

following chapters, I will point to the limitations of discourses that describe Korean television dramas as exclusively national media. I will analyze how the labors and desires of Hallyu fans from different parts of the world make Korean television dramas transnational. More specifically, in the following chapter, I examine how Hallyu fans watch Korean television dramas and experience visceral emotional responses to the depictions of Korean masculinity and intimacy in these dramas. They mobilize these emotions and desires in ways that extend beyond the boundaries set up by the discourses of the Korean television drama production staff.

Chapter 4

Digitalized Intimacies of Hallyu

Hallyu dramas, as well as other contents of Hallyu, are largely consumed online; therefore, new media (online streaming and online fan forums) are critical components of Hallyu. Through new media, fans from all over the world enter into transnational intimacies that were not possible with traditional television. New media are facilitating increasingly dense and fast-paced "time-space compressions" (Harvey 1999). It goes without saying that it would be misguided to assume that new media have introduced global connections. After all, the world has always been hierarchically interconnected (Wolf 1982, Gupta and Ferguson 1992). According to Eric Wolf (1982), academics are the ones who disassembled the interconnections and narrowed their focus on self-sustaining societies and nation-states as an easy way to discuss cultural differences. In essence, people and objects have been migrating across continents and national boundaries before the advent of the internet. Although critical academic research on transnationalism focus on diasporas and migrant population (Foner 1997), transnationalism is not only about the movement of bodies from one geographic region to another but also comprises of the movement of objects like letters, videos, and food (Mahler 1998). Furthermore, as Appadurai (1996) notes, transnationalism is also about the cross-border movement of media and ideologies. Hallyu is a case in point whereby not only the bodies of Hallyu tourists but also popular cultural texts and the ideas embedded in them move across national borders.

Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini (1997) claim that transnationalism creates alternative imaginations that create identities beyond those inscribed by the nation-state. According to Ong and Nonini, people reimagine their lives through the development of "third culture" that belongs

somewhere in the margins of interconnected cultures. Transnationalism fosters "alternative" imaginations and transnational media extend such desires and imaginations even further. To borrow Mayfair Yang's (1997) words, "Since media provide ways for audiences to traverse great distances without physically moving from local sites, they are crucial components of transnationalism" (288). I suggest that transnational media not only unlink imaginations from geographic locales but also do the same for desires. Thus, transnational media facilitate transnational imaginations that broaden the scope of individual desires to faraway places and cultures.

Imagination has always been a crucial component of our everyday lives, but because of new media it has acquired a new force in our lives today. According to Urry and Sheller (2006), changes in the technologies we use to communicate facilitate new forms of connections. In other words, transnational connections through digital networks expand the scope of inter-personal and inter-cultural connections beyond preexisting social pathways. The world is becoming ever more interconnected as digital connections become faster and denser. Appadurai (1996) terms the increasingly intertwining and dense transnational digital connections "mediascapes." Due to the mediascapes, "the line between the realistic and the fictional landscapes they [the audience] see are blurred" (Appadurai 1996, 35). The complex intertwining between mediascapes creates the potential for people to construct imagined worlds out of cultures they have never seen or experienced in person.

Building on such theories, I suggest that transnational media not only facilitate transnational imaginations and desires but also transnational intimacies. Transnational intimacies existed before transnational media, but I contend that digitalization of media creates increasingly dense and multifarious intimacies across national boundaries. For example, Hallyu produces

transnational intimacies through global fans' erotic desires for Korean men that they digitally share. Through such sharing of one's erotic desires, multiple intimacies form among the Hallyu fans in the digital and the corporeal realm. Threaded through all these intimacies are the transnational fans' fantasies about Korean men as intimate partners.

Since intimacy can be interpreted in many different ways, I find it necessary to define what I mean. According to Ara Wilson (2016), intimacy refers to the microphysics of power: "Intimacy commonly provides a synonym for a concept of proximate, close relations: local, microlevel, private, embodied, involving the psyche" (249). Intimacy can range from interpersonal relations of the bodies to that of the psyche. It is both a private and a public concept that permeates our lives. However, normative conceptions of intimacy entail some form of physical proximity. As Gill Valentine (2006) articulates, the words "intimate" and "close" are often used interchangeably in our lives because of the assumption that one has to be physically close to become intimate. More specifically, some scholars use the word intimate to refer to sexual relations (Berlant 2000).

However, as other scholars point out, the internet extends the conception of intimacies by making "physically distant" intimacies ever more possible (Boris and Parrenas 2010). For instance, Valentine (2006) points to queer online communities where closeted folks meet discretely to share their woes and to have sex; Nicole Constable (2007) analyzes online chat forums where Western men seek foreign brides. In both of these cases, intimacy is not predicated on physical proximity. The internet serves as a mediator through which people far away from each other can feel intimate. The digitalization of transnational media has created alternative forms of transnational intimacies. Urry and Sheller (2006) suggest that in the age of the internet, individuals have a corporeal as well as a digital presence online; one's digital presence extends

the scope of one's transnationality by circumventing the limitations of one's corporeal mobility. The records of what one has seen, bookmarked, commented on, and liked online create a digital figure of oneself that moves transnationally of its own accord. In a similar vein, physical distance is not equivalent to remoteness; rather, digital spaces facilitate new types of intimacy between people who are physically distant (Constable 2013).

In this regard, while early works on television situated it within the politics of home and the complex reinterpretation of domesticity (Mankekar 1999), new media create a form of transnational intimacy among the viewers that take television beyond the politics of home and domesticity. Maimuna Dali Islam (2014) points out, online spaces are halfway points between fantasy and tangible worlds. New media potentially bring solitary activities of watching television on the computer into a communal space of online fandom where fantasies and the tangible worlds intermix. In other words, digital media facilitate a type of transnational intimacy that offer new imaginings and new opportunities divorced from local constraints. At the same time, they are mired in, and perpetuate, their own norms and stereotypes.

Pratt and Rosner (2006) note, "Global forces penetrate and haunt the intimate spaces of our psyches and bodies in ways that we can only intimate, and there is no territorial defense of privacy or domesticity that protects the intimate from the global" (18). I take a more optimistic approach to the intersection between transnational media and intimacy. Rather than viewing transnational media as something that "penetrates" and "haunts" like an intruder, I argue that these media provide materials and space for alternative imaginations and intimacies; Hallyu fans are not forcibly "penetrated" and haunted by Korean television dramas. The dramas both create and recharge desires that the fans could not find in existing local media.

In this chapter, I analyze what I call "Hallyu online." Specifically, I investigate the

interconnected ways in which Hallyu fans transnationally imagine, desire, and form intimacies through the internet especially in regards to their erotic desires. I analyze three different online spaces that Hallyu fans utilize to form transnational intimacies: YouTube fan-made music videos, K-Drama fan forum Soompi, and timed comments on Rakuten Viki, an Asian drama streaming website. In these spaces, I examine the objects and subjects of Hallyu fans' desires and how they transnationally connect via imagined concepts of Korean romantic masculinity. Since only a select few of the Hallyu fans can afford to become Hallyu tourists, these digital spaces are great archives to observe a broader segment of transnational Hallyu fandom.

I am not implying that the Hallyu fans, whose online comments I analyze in this chapter, are homogenous in their desires for Korean men. Nor is it my intent to group them into a monolithic community of "fans" who are stripped of their cultural, racial, gender, sexual, and national identities. Rather, in this chapter, I aim to examine how these Hallyu fans from different parts of the world form transnational intimacies with each other by sharing their erotic desires and fantasies (about Korean men) through digital spaces.

As will be made evident later in this chapter, some of the Hallyu fans' online comments perpetuate neo-Orientalist binaries by making essentialist claims about "Korean masculinity" as well as "Western masculinity" and contrasting these two masculinities in ways that make them appear as though they are completely antithetical. In analyzing these online comments, I am not trying to perpetuate or give credence to the East-West binary. Rather, I critically engage these comments to analyze the extent to which digitally disseminated fantasies about Korean masculinity influence my Hallyu tourist informants' "realities." What is the role of new media (online fan forums, YouTube, online streaming websites) in the formulation and transnational dissemination of erotic fantasies about Korean men? Specifically, what kind of fantasies are

being created in these new media spaces that inspire some Hallyu fans to seek intimate relationships with Korean men in "real life" through Hallyu tourism?

I posit that the Hallyu fans, whose online comments I analyze in this chapter, erotically desire Korean men and use online spaces to mediate the (physical) distance between themselves and Korean men. Hallyu tourism is an extension of such online activities. Here, the term "Korean men" refers not only to actual men living in Korea but also to the fictional Korean heroes featured in the dramas. In arguing my point, I draw from the literature that analyzes the multisensorial pleasures viewers derive through television. Linda Williams (1991) discusses what she calls "body genres." These genres of film, namely horror, pornography, and melodrama create sensations in the viewers' bodies. However, the so-called "body genres" do not merely attempt to induce its viewers to mimic the on-screen emotions: just because a character is crying on screen does not mean that viewers are only expected to cry (to some extent, they are, but to say that mirroring is the *only* goal of "body genres" would be somewhat misleading). Although Williams does not provide an in-depth explanation of what else "body genres" set out to do, her theoretical framework is especially helpful in my research on digital Hallyu. I will expand on Williams' assertion that body genres do more than just create mimicry of emotional responses in their viewers. If we categorize Korean television dramas as melodramatic "body genres," what kind of erotic pleasures are the Hallyu fans experiencing through these dramas?

Laura Marks (1998) associates erotic pleasures with "haptic visuality." In opposition to "optic visuality" which focuses on vision, haptic visuality draws upon other senses so that viewers' entire bodies are involved in the act of seeing. Marks argues that such haptic visuality is erotic:

> Haptic images are erotic regardless of their content, because they construct an intersubjective relationship between beholder and image. The viewer is called upon to fill in the gaps in the image, engage with the traces the image leaves. By interacting up close with an image, close enough that figure and ground commingle, the viewer gives up her own sense of separateness from the image (341).

Here, Marks argues that haptic visuality is erotic because it forms intimate relations between viewers and the media. The viewers "complete" the mediatized image through their imaginations by "fill[ing] in the gaps in the image" and, in the process, the viewers become intimately and erotically intertwined with the mediatized images.

Mankekar (2013) argues that the kinaesthetic dimension of television complicates the popular conception of viewers as mere couch potatoes who are sedentary, immobile, and ready to be indoctrinated. Viewers actively interact with television in that television shows are used to "extend our sense of sight, hearing and, in the examples I analyse here, touch, smell, taste and movement" (609). Through television, the "distant" becomes "proximate." This seems relevant to Hallyu in its essence; through Korean television dramas and their kinaesthetic pleasures, Hallyu fans move to Korea as Hallyu tourists. In this chapter, I examine the corporeal "movement" through the online spaces of Hallyu. Although not all Hallyu fans physically get on an airplane and travel to Korea, a significant number of them use online spaces to kinaesthetically as well as emotionally "move" to become more intimate with Korea, its notion of eroticism and romance, as well as its men. Not only that, in their efforts to become more intimate with Korean men, some Hallyu fans also become intimate with each other through these

digital spaces. Digital spaces of Hallyu create multilinear intimacies amongst the fans and between the fans and Korean men. In the following sections, I will address these questions: How do Hallyu fans use online spaces to create new modes of transnational intimacy? And how does corporeality factor into such digital intimacies? I begin answering these questions through an analysis of fan-made music videos.

Fan-made Music Videos, an Introduction to Korean Romance

Millions of fan-made music videos dedicated to Korean television dramas exist on YouTube. For instance, a quick search in English and Korean reveals 38 million videos about the drama *My Love from the Star* alone. Accounting for the sheer number, the videos have divergent styles and are made through different mixtures of cultures as well as languages. In this section, I analyze fan-made music videos with English titles and descriptions: I ranked the fan-made music videos of the dramas *My Love from the Star*, *Descendants of the Sun*, and *The Guardian* by viewership and analyzed the top ten videos as well as viewer reactions to those videos. These videos are important because a majority of the Hallyu tourists whom I interviewed have repeated to me that these YouTube clips were their first introductions to the world of Hallyu dramas.

The music videos reflect various cultural influences. Roughly half of the music videos use Korean songs while the other half combines drama imagery with English pop songs. For the music videos that use Korean songs, the creators meticulously subtitle the Korean lyrics as well as the lines from the dramas to make them legible to non-Korean speaking viewers. Some go one step further by providing different kinds of subtitles.[16] For instance, in one of the most popular

[16] For examples, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jfco9C1bR34&index=33&list=PLAoTMPNIV04eTk0VEbEKTnhg8CrJZvv80

videos for *My Love from the Star*, three different subtitles flash on the screen: first, it is the typical English translation of the lyrics, second is the Romanization of Korean words to the lyric so that the viewers could sound out the lyrics and sing along with the music video, and third is the lyrics in Korean alphabet (*Hangeul*). Not only is the music video visually pleasurable, but it also aims to serve an educational purpose through its subtitles. These types of videos seemed to help Hallyu fans I worked with learn Korean. Many of my informants could sing along to the drama's original soundtracks despite not being fluent or knowledgeable in Korean.

As for the music videos that utilize pop songs, the songs' English audio and the Korean imagery on-screen mesh together because the emotion that runs throughout the songs and the videos are similar: an emotion of romantic desire. For example, in one of the videos, Kristina Maria, a Canadian pop star sings, "To say that I miss you doesn't cut it. How much I love you I just can't describe" while on-screen Dr. Kang tearfully reminisces about the happy days she spent with Captain Yoo after being notified that he died during a military operation.[17] In another video, Alex & Sierra, the show *America's Got Talent* contestants sing "You leave me room for my imperfections. When I'm a mess you jump right in. If I drift in the wrong direction you turn the tide and you calm the wind. Anytime, every time I get lost you will find me," as the fan-made music video flashes with a montage of the Goblin and Eun-tak couple's loving gaze towards each other throughout their turbulent relationship that spans the entirety of the series.[18] The songs used in the music videos talk of love and missing the loved one while the Korean drama scenes chosen by the editors depict similar struggles of love.

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[17] For an example of a fan-made music video, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BTRGDWm3txo&list=PLAoTMPNIV04eTk0VEbEKTnhg8CrJZvv80&index=20

[18] For reference, watch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mo6vlSVZMLs&index=25&list=PLAoTMPNIV04eTk0VEbEKTnhg8CrJZvv80

In discussing queer "gay and lesbi" identities in Indonesia, Tom Boellstorf (2003) connects them to the "dubbing culture" of Western films in Asia. When films are dubbed, the Asian sounds and Western visual do not perfectly match, and the purported binary between import-export as well as authentic-inauthentic become insufficient. Furthermore, they symbolize the nonteleological dimensions of transnationality; transnational media's power is not absolute in that they cannot "indoctrinate" all of their viewers with the message that they want to convey. Rather, the transnationality of media can often lead to unexpected outcomes as viewers from different parts of the world reinterpret and "dub" the media through their lens. I see the Hallyu fan-made music videos serving similar purposes. As the multicultural fan-made YouTube videos suggest, Hallyu dramas appeal to fans from diverse cultural backgrounds. Through such multicultural fan-made music videos, the supposed binaries between the "authentic" and the "inauthentic" as well as that of national and transnational become blurred.

Before connecting with other fans, Hallyu fans think of their romantic desires as personal and internal emotions that people around them do not share. After all, as Lyan and Levkowitz (2015) state in their research on Israeli fans of Hallyu, these transnational Hallyu fans are still "niche" from the point of view of their home countries: their enthusiasm for Korean pop culture is neither shared nor understood by their immediate family and friends. They are deemed "weird" for liking entertainment from Korea. However, online, they meet fans who share their same sentiments and desires and feel a sense of relief as well as satisfaction from making such digital connections. In that sense, YouTube fan-made music video comment sections become spaces of romantic expressiveness and affirmation.

The comment sections of these music videos serve as spaces where Hallyu fans empathize with each other and share their desires for Korean men and Korean romance. For

instance, one commenter said, "K-drama actors are beyond perfect. It set the bar high for men of real-world to qualify so I prefer to lost in da world of K-dramas though I know such person doesn't really exist in real world [sic]" to which numerous sub-comments voiced agreement: "Omo, and I thought I was the only one!!! [sic]"[19] As Alexis Lothian (2015) notes, making music videos is a fan activity of love: the videos are their love songs towards the object of their desires. In Korean television drama fandom as well, fans expressed their desire for Korean men by creating fan-made videos. Other viewers of the videos empathized with the music video-creators and expressed excitement about having found others who have the same desires and imaginations as themselves. In this sense, watching Korean television dramas and desiring the televisual subjects are no longer just solitary activities: they become communal activities. These Hallyu fans realize that they are not "the only ones" fostering desires for Korean men.

These fans, who share similar desires for Korean men, use the incognito encounter in online spaces to have lengthy conversations about Korean dramas' portrayal of "love":

> Viewer 1: In my opinion, Goblin (*The Guardian*) is better than *Descendants of the Sun*. Anyone agree?
>
> Viewer 2: I agree 1000000% with you
>
> Viewer 3: Both are different, one is about love other is about the love you wish to get but never receive
>
> Viewer 4: That's right, how can one compare one with another
>
> Viewer 5: In *Descendants of the Sun*, even after I realize that it's a happy ending for both the couples, still my heart aches. They were apart from each

[19] For a glimpse into fan discussion, visit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jfco9C1bR34&list=PLAoTMPNIV04eTk0VEbEKTnhg8CrJZvv80&index=33

other for a long time. Still they waited for each other. Indeed, true love can wait <3[20]

One commenter raised the above issue at a fan-made music video on the drama *The Guardian*. Even though the music video which sparked this debate was solely based on *The Guardian*, the debate among the fans freely flowed between *The Guardian* as well as *Descendants of the Sun* as if people who watched one of the dramas assuredly watched the other. With the relative anonymity that digital spaces provide, and because these debates are occurring within a digital space created for Hallyu fans, individuals are emboldened to extrapolate on the type of love stories from which they derive pleasure.

Threaded through the comments, there is an idealization of a love that takes a long time to be fulfilled. For instance, the commenters said that the drama depicts "love you wish to get but never receive" and that "true love can wait." In other words, one of the reasons they find pleasure in Korean dramas is because of the dramas' portrayal of love as a long-drawn-out waiting game. Melodramas build on the emotions of longing and melancholy attached to the disjointed temporality of two lovers. Prime examples of such disjointed temporalities would be the stereotypical melodramatic plots about unrequited love, or scenes of heroes running towards the bus/train station after the heroines have already left due to misunderstandings. Without such missed opportunities, romantic melodramas would end up being very short and boring stories. I point out the commenters' desires for long-drawn-out love to emphasize how their erotic desires are not rooted in fast-paced and sex-oriented eroticism. Rather, their motivation in seeking

[20] Visit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHCTBn9DULw&list=PLAoTMPNIV04eTk0VEbEKTnhg8CrJZvv80&index=24 for the script to the full discussion.

intimacy with Korean men seems to be based on eroticism somewhat detached from "casual" sex acts. Their notion of ideal romance is one that takes time to build and, in that regard, embedded in these desires there seems to be some form of nostalgia for the romance of the imagined "past" when romantic intimacies supposedly developed at a slower pace than they do now.

Ingyu Oh (2011) analyzes Japanese women's love for the Hallyu drama *Winter Sonata* as a form of nostalgic longing. According to Oh, Japanese women enjoy watching Korean television dramas because the dramas remind them of a Japanese "past" where romantic intimacies were purportedly more physically restrained than they are in contemporary Japan. Oh claims that these Japanese women's desires relegate Korea to the temporal "past" and, thereby, perpetuate a hierarchical and colonial relationship between the two countries. Based on Oh's psychoanalytic analyses of Japanese Hallyu fans, these fans believe that Japan no longer has slow-paced romance because it has become too modernized. According to such colonialist logic, Korea still retains "slow" qualities of romance because it has not reached the level of modernity that Japan has already achieved. I do not condone such ideologies because they are extensions of Japanese justification of their colonization of Korea during the 19th and 20th centuries. However, based on my research, it is not just Japanese fans who seek Korean dramas and experience a sense of nostalgia as they watch the dramas. My informants from other countries also liked Korean television dramas because they depicted slow-paced romance that supposedly differ from casual sexual relationships depicted in Hollywood films. In that regard, are my Hallyu tourist informants also relegating Korea to the "past" and perpetuating neo-Orientalist binaries through their racialized erotic desires for Korean men? Or are there other explanations for their erotic fantasies?

According to Kara Keeling (2007), images and media have the power to subvert

hegemonic common sense. Keeling uses the example of Black films: by offering an image or a portrayal of Blackness that does not conform to the racist understanding of Black bodies, some Black films undermine the "hegemonic common sense" regarding US notion of Blackness. Once these "common sense" notions are debunked, the knowledge built on such purported "common sense" becomes nullified as well, paving the way for new knowledge formulations unhindered by preexisting racist "hegemonic common sense." I find Keeling's concept applicable to Korean television dramas as well. Korean television dramas and their digital fan spaces are popular because they undermine the "hegemonic common sense" of romance and masculinity for their transnational fans.

Korean television dramas complicate the "hegemonic common sense" of masculinity and intimacy both in Korea and in the respective cultures of my informants. Exasperated by the intimate partners available to them, my informants turned (or "escaped") to Korean television dramas to fantasize and look for alternative forms of intimacy. For instance, many of my Hallyu tourist informants spoke of their preference for Korean men's restrained masculine sexuality. They described the exasperation they felt at having to fight tooth-and-nail against hypersexual men in their respective cultures who made unwanted sexual advances towards them. My informants believed that Korean men do not engage in such sexual aggression. Such sentiments seemed to echo through the Hallyu fans' online comments as well. The digital communities serve as spaces where Hallyu fans fantasize about their own concept of ideal masculinity and romance. In some ways, such fantasies complicate the essentialist (or the "hegemonic common sense") binary between the East and the West, but at other times they reaffirm such Orientalist binaries.

Women expressing romantic desires after reading/watching romantic entertainment is not a phenomenon unique to Korean television dramas. Several feminist scholars have analyzed

ways in which women (particularly middle-aged housewives) use soap operas and other entertainment genres stereotypically categorized as "feminine genres" to escape from their daily lives (Ang 2007b, Modleski 2007). The "sense of escape" for these housewives is not "escapism from reality" as alleged by some critics but is, instead, a way to supplement their experiences with romance. Pleasures derived from the romantic genre influence viewers' desires. The influence of romantic genres is even more profound in younger, unmarried women. According to some scholars (Segrin and Nabi 2002), romance genres fundamentally influence unmarried women's expectations of relationships, intimacy, and marriage. Rather than providing simple "escape," these narratives provide reference points for women's romantic expectations. Hence, feminist scholars encourage academics to focus on the *reason* women feel the need to "escape" from their everyday through the consumption of "women's genres" as opposed to blindly critiquing them for their choice of entertainment (Ang and Couling 1985, Modleski 2007).

The Korean dramas and the fan-made music videos serve as mechanisms that allow viewers to "escape" from their daily problems. For example, a commenter said, "This Korean drama is a magic because while you watching this it gives you a different happiness and you forget all your problems in the meantime… just sharing my thoughts [sic]," to which another responded, "This couple literally saved my life. I was going crazy with jealousy over this guy (yeah ok I know it sounds stupid) but my friend told me to watch MLFAS (*My Love from the Star*). Their couple chemistry made me forget about that jerk I couldn't get over."[21] These comments received approvals from other viewers represented by dozens of "likes" to the comment. Janice Radway (2009) analyzes similar cases of US housewives "escaping" from their house chores into the Harlequin romance novels. However, I contend that the mechanism of

[21] See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JiMzpnY5Ph8&index=32&list=PLAoTMPNIV04eTk0VEbEKTnhg8CrJZvv80

“escape” for Radway’s subjects and mine are slightly different. These differences are based on the fact that for Radway’s informants,’ “escape” came in the form of printed copies of novels, while my informants’ mode of “escape” came through new media. For the housewives in Radway’s research, their “escape” was into the literary world of romance novels; they were physically isolated from others and it was this physical isolation and immersion into the novels that provided them with a sense of escape.

However, for the Hallyu fans who commented on the YouTube videos, their “escape” happens on two registers. First, they immersed themselves in the television dramas and, second, they commented on their feelings to an anonymous online community of Hallyu fans: their “escape” is neither isolated nor solitary, it is communal. Their “escape” is an “escape” to another community that understands and empathizes with their desires. In this regard, it appears that the Hallyu fans who commented on the YouTube videos not only strove to create transnational intimacies with Korean men but also used the online spaces to create intimacies with other Hallyu fans. In other words, Hallyu is multilinear in its formation of transnational intimacies. YouTube videos and their comment sections are one example of transnational intimacies formulated within and around Hallyu.

Even if separated through physical distance, Hallyu fans who interact online experienced physically intimate sensations with each other through digital connections. Constable’s (2013) subjects who frequented online chat rooms were reported to have fallen off their chairs from laughing at jokes they heard online or having experienced heartaches together. Both the act of falling off the chair or experiencing heartaches were corporeal events triggered by digital encounters. Therefore, digital connections do not exclude physical connections. As I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, there is a rich body of literature on the relationship between

visual media and viewers' corporeality. In the case of Korean television drama fans, pain/heartache is the dominant shared sensation described in digital Korean drama communities. The online comments on the fan-made music videos frequently say something along the lines of: "I started crying and I felt like my *heart was broken apart*. I clearly understand how sad he was," "Every time I saw all wonderful goblin clips I feel my *heart bleeding* remembering their beautiful sad love story," "Crying right now, I love a *heart ache*," "*touching my heart*."[22] Through the shared experience of painful sensations of romance, the commenters connected and shared a sense of belonging with a small group of people who felt the same way.

The digital and the human become inseparable in these instances of empathy among the transnational fans. Sedgwick (2003) argues the distinction between digital and analog as well as one between machine and human is never absolute because of the shifting boundary between such binary categorizations. As Mankekar (2013) notes in her research on Indian lifestyle television shows, the show hosts constantly use haptic visuality by describing the texture of the food, asking the viewers to listen to the crispness of the food, and describing the aroma of a restaurant. In that sense, even though visual media – including the internet – may have their limitations in being unable to substitute for actual touching (Valentine 2006), that does not mean that the viewers are untouched. Through the acutely painful sensation of emotional tactility, the drama fans form transnational intimacies despite such limitations of technology. Digital spaces provide Hallyu fans intimacies with other fans that are at once digital as well as corporeal. How does the convergence of the digital and the corporeal complicate the supposed binary of fantasy and reality? Furthermore, how is Korean masculinity positioned in the midst of such convergences? I will address these questions in the following section by using the example of

[22] For example of such emotional descriptions, visit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m64Od5u7eNc&index=17&list=PLAoTMPNIV04eTk0VEbEKTnhg8CrJZvv80

Rakuten Viki.

Digital Friends: Rakuten Viki and Timed Comments

Rakuten Viki describes itself as "Global TV powered by fans: Thousands of TV shows and movies. Millions of engaged viewers. Endless possibilities." They claim to reach a global audience of 1 billion viewers. Viki is a US-based company that was created by Harvard and Stanford graduate students who wanted to remove barriers for viewers who wanted to experience entertainment from other cultures (Swisher 2013). Viewers can subscribe to the website for a commercial-free experience. By subscribing to monthly or annual plans offered by the website, the viewers can stream television programs and films from various East Asian Countries with limited or no commercial breaks. Individuals can choose to watch the videos for free if they are willing to experience commercial breaks in between. Although these viewer subscriptions contribute to the website's profit, much like other streaming websites, Rakuten Viki primarily makes money through in-stream advertisement revenues that the website shares with its content providers (Swisher 2013). The website, which used to be simply called Viki, was bought by Rakuten, the largest Japanese-based e-commerce company, in 2013 and renamed itself, Rakuten Viki.

As the unique name of the website states, it claims itself to be the "Wikipedia" of "videos" because the website features an expansive library of dramas and television shows from East Asia. Although it features television shows from various East Asian countries, the main features on the website are Korean television dramas. The unique aspect of this website is that its subtitles are all created by the fans themselves. The website constantly recruits "fan volunteers" to subtitle the shows as well as manage the television drama fan pages. It is only through such

minimally paid and largely voluntary labor of fans that the website can provide subtitles in over 20 different languages. However, these fans do not complain about having to do all this labor. Rather, they praise the website for its interactive-ness. After all, "its community of fansubbers is united by passion for specific programs, movies or genres, and the wish to share this content with as wide an audience as possible. As its homepage declares, they "translate to spread the love" (Dwyer 2012, 218).

The transnational fans of Korean television dramas emotionally connect through Viki's "timed comments." Unlike Netflix or any other popular streaming website for that matter, Viki is unique in that it provides "timed comments" function. Other streaming websites either forego the viewer comments (like Netflix) or have a comments section that stands separate from the videos (like Amazon Prime). However, on Viki, the viewers' comments appear *on the screen*, overlapped on top of the dramas themselves. It creates the effect of multiple viewers all watching the dramas together and reacting to the scenes "live." It is as if, instead of having a talkative family member beside you watching the drama together in the same room, you have multiple talkative digital friends with whom you are sharing the viewing experience in real-time. For example, in *Descendants of the Sun*, one of the most popular dramas on the website during 2018, there were at least four comments per second for all 60 minutes of each episode of the drama. At times when something more dramatic happened on screen, the timed comments section erupted to an average of 20 comments per second. These comments were in all different languages including French, Spanish, English and Arabic which represent the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the Korean television drama viewership.

Sometimes, the timed comments themselves rather than the dramas become forms of entertainment. For example, these timed comments from Viki's *Descendants of the Sun* page

indicate: “I CAN'T THESE COMMENTS ARE AMAZING XD [sic]” (episode 3, 43:44), “Lol oh mah gad instead of me reading the subtitles I'm reading the comments and damn thy are funny!! [sic]” (episode 3, 55:57), “I love the comment section lmaooo [sic]” (episode 3, 56:15). The subtitles and the timed comments appear simultaneously on-screen: the language subtitles appear at the bottom of the screen while timed comments appear at the top of the screen. Although the timed comment section can be turned off, many viewers say they elect not to do so because the timed-comments are part of the pleasures of watching the dramas on Rakuten Viki. The transnational viewers may be watching the dramas alone in the privacy of their room on personal laptops or cellphones, but they are connected through these timed comments that make the drama viewing experience feel more communal than isolated. In discussing the US teens’ sexting practice, Julie Cupples and Lee Thompson (2010) posit, “The ability to say things you wouldn’t normally say suggests that in this sense, texting like other forms of virtuality permits the projection of alternative identities and new modes of spatial becoming” (9). For the Hallyu fans, online spaces provide the “virtuality” that allows for “new modes of spatial becoming” in which they feel intimate with other Hallyu fans whom they have probably never met in person.

The viewers actively use the timed comments section to interact with each other and discuss particularly salient or moving scenes. Even though they are physically separate from each other, the viewers make remarks, sympathize, and respond to each other’s digital personas as if the conversations are happening in-person in real-time. During a particular scene in the drama *Descendants of the Sun* where the hero appeared to die, viewers shared their emotions:

> Viewer 1: am i the only one crying my eyes out? (episode 15, 26:29)
>
> Viewer 2: my heart is being ripped to pieces. (26:31)

Viewer 3: no you are not alone (26:33) [sic]

They reaffirmed each other's emotions by articulating that the pain is not being felt alone and that it is an emotion shared by others as well.

Vivian Sobchack (1990) describes the dialogic and dialectic tension between the bodies depicted on screen, the bodies of the viewers, and the bodies of the cinematic film itself in one's active comprehension and consumption of the film as the "viewing view" (21). Sobchack argues that our interpretation of films should not focus solely on the two bodies: the body of the person on screen and that of the viewer. Sobchack points to the often ignored body of the film itself in dictating viewers' attention. I suggest that Korean digital streaming websites do not just experience tension between three bodies analyzed by Sobchack, they also contend with a fourth body: the body of other viewers who share similar emotions as oneself. In the case of Rakuten Viki, on top of these three bodies, the fourth body of the "other viewers" and the comments that they leave on screen also come to dictate the viewers' focus. When one sees comments such as "my heart is being ripped to pieces" while streaming the television drama, it functions to focus one's attention on the scene as well as to one's bodily response to the scene. In that sense, it creates transnational intimacies among the Hallyu fans through connected emotional as well as corporeal experiences.

While the timed comment sections are used by the viewers to feel a sense of community through shared feelings, they seemed to become most vibrant and connected during their conversations about their shared desires for Korean men as well as their stereotypes or preconceptions about Korean dating culture/men. "Where can I find a guy like him?" (episode 1, 48:44) one commenter asked rhetorically, to which others responded by saying "He is bae," I am

in love," and "I find the other taller guy with sad eyes so hot ...I'm attracted to him more than the lead not that the lead isn't cute." These desires echo the sentiments of my Hallyu tourist informants who visited Korea to seek the answer to the question: "Where can I find a guy like him?" In this respect, fantasies created and shared in these online spaces profoundly influence the "real life" experiences of the Hallyu fans/tourists.

Regarding fantasy, Nicole Constable (2007) argues that online spaces provide possibilities for "bodily pleasure through the Internet, and the voluntary if not equal participation of a man and a woman in a physical and emotional relationship in virtual space. Yet it also illustrates how Internet fantasies and experiences cannot easily be transplanted into real life" (265). Through her research on Chinese/Filipina women's virtual relationships with US men through online chat rooms, Constable argues that fantasies online are not transferable to real life. This is true to some extent because, as I argue in Chapter 5, my Hallyu tourist informants' experiences with Korean men do not always live up to their fantasies. Yet, I suggest that "online fantasy" and "real life" are not entirely mutually exclusive. My research shows that fantasy, more specifically erotic fantasies inspired through Hallyu dramas, are translated into, and influence, the lived experience of my informants. Their erotic fantasies of "soft" Korean masculinity dictate how they describe and interpret their encounters with Korean men. Hence, the fantasies outlined in these online spaces of Hallyu are not just isolated figments of individual imagination. They are thoughts and desires that critically shape transnational intimacies and the formation of Korean masculinity in the global dating scene.

In this regard, it is important to make note of some racialized stereotypes of Korean men that run throughout these online comments. Amidst the celebratory remarks about Korean men's good looks, some fans comment in a manner that seems to adhere to racist stereotypes about

Asian masculinity: “he still looks like a stick [sic]” (50:01), “Pretty none aging face, deep manly voice, body hot asf[23]..smart and awesome personality how can one person be so blessed [sic]” (50:08), and “i don't know who is prettier? song haegyo or song joongki dang.. [sic]” (51:21). Such comments were made on Rakuten Viki in response to a scene in *Descendants of the Sun* where the semi-naked male character Yu exercises at the gym. While shirtless, Yu calls the heroine Kang: one side of the split-screen shows the muscular, topless, sweaty and glistening male character while the other half of the screen shows a close-up of the heroine’s face as she talks with the hero on the phone. While the comment about the male character looking “like a stick” made a poignantly negative remark which reflects the stereotype of Asian men’s physical weakness (this is especially more so because Yu is depicted as very fit and muscular in this scene), other comments were complimenting the hero’s good looks. Yet, the complimentary comments also seemed to draw from stereotypes of Asian men’s effeminacy. For example, the male protagonist is described as having a youthful-looking face but “body hot asf.” This resembles how the Western mainstream critics described Korean pop singer *Rain* when he made his US debut. Shin (2009) argues that Korean men’s embodiment of masculinity cannot be defined by any of the Western masculine categories. Hence, these Asian men’s bodies are interpreted as boyish and immature masculinity that aspire to the “mature” and “authentic” masculinity of Western men. Although the online commenters were mostly in agreement about their desires for Korean men, the context and the content of their desires were intertwined with Orientalist and racialized formations of Asian masculinity.

Robin Zheng (2016) breaks down the phenomenon of “yellow fever” in which Asians are erotically fetishized by people of other races. Zheng states that yellow fever stems from:

[23] “hot asf” means “hot as fuck”

"The 'gendering' of races, whereby Asians as a racialized group are stereotyped as feminine, due to their purportedly shy, soft-spoken, submissive racial 'essence', [which] produces what might be called the 'double feminization' of the Asian woman" (405). Zheng chooses to focus on Asian women's experience with racial fetishism as opposed to Asian male experience with it because the US (or "Western") perceptions position Asian women as exotic and desirable while posing Asian men as sexually undesirable (Nguyen 2014). However, in the context of Hallyu, I would argue that "yellow fever" applies to how some Hallyu fans eroticize Korean men. Regardless of whether the subjects of yellow fever are Asian men or women, yellow fever is problematic because, "The racial depersonalization inherent in yellow fever threatens Asian/American women [and men] with doubts as to whether they are or can be loved as individuals rather than as objects in a category" (Zheng 2016, 408). In other words, according to Zheng, romantic relationships are premised on individualization: one expects to be romantically desired by one's significant other due to one's uniqueness as a human being. In contrast, "yellow fever" makes it seem as though Asian women (or men) are easily replaceable intimate partners, because in "yellow fever," the fact of one's desirability is premised on one's racial identity as an Asian rather than on one's unique qualities.

Perhaps as a pushback against such racialized erotic desires, some of my Korean male informants expressed disdain at the soft and alternative masculinity represented by Hallyu dramas and K-pop. My Korean male informants preferred to adhere to and aspire towards a sense of "traditional" masculinity as opposed to the ones depicted and marketed via Hallyu contents. Even some men I observed performing the so-called soft masculinities described their acts as just a performance and not something that represented their "true" manliness. As I elaborate in Chapter 6, I hypothesize that these Korean men's contempt towards "alternative" masculinities is

related to their resistance to giving up their gender privileges.

At the same time, it is important to note that the "alternative" masculinities do not undermine the patriarchal gender hierarchy either. "Soft" Korean masculinity is not shaped by Korean men's "real life" gender performances per se: they are largely created through the fictional stories of Korean television dramas and the Hallyu fan-activities online. Cupples and Thompson (2010) claim that "Gender is also produced by technological devices as well as by discourses and human forms of meaning making" (13). For instance, in Hallyu, scholars have looked at how digital consumption of K-pop shape young Asian girls' gendered and sexualized sense of self (Lin and Tong 2008, Shim 2007, Liew et al. 2011). I contend that it is not just the viewers' genders and sexualities that are formulated through digital spaces of Hallyu; "soft" Korean masculinity is also shaped through the online discourses of Hallyu fans. This is especially the case regarding issues of Korean men's sexuality and romanticism:

> Viewer 1: they should have kissed :((episode 15, 14:51)
>
> Viewer 2: it is like they sign a contract not to kiss ;((14:51)
>
> Viewer 3: Asian does not depend on "kiss" for every occasion (14:54)
>
> Viewer 4: I feel like if they kissed they truly wouldn't be able to part ways (14:57)
>
> Viewer 5: I love K Drama 'cause they don't kiss in like every single scene like in USA, i always mute/skip it, it's just meh... (14:58)
>
> Viewer 6: isn't there a saying like if u don't need your characters to kiss to know they're in love, it's a good written romance? (15:12)[24] [sic]

[24] Watch *Descendants of the Sun* episode 15 on Rakuten Viki for the full discussion.

The debate was spurred by a scene in the *Descendants of the Sun* where the couple says their goodbyes to each other before the hero departs on a dangerous mission. Some viewers felt that the scene was compromised because it did not depict the couple's passion through physical intimacy, while other fans liked the scene *because of* its lack of physical intimacy. Although the sexual and the emotional are not necessarily binary concepts, some commenters drew such binaries in comparing Korean dramas with that of the US. These commenters' erotic desires appeared to be facilitated by binary assumptions about Korean men's sexually unassuming nature contrasted to the supposed hypermasculinity of "Western" men. These commenters' erotic desires for Korean men reinforce the stereotype of Asian men as sexually incompetent and submissive.

The online spaces and technologies function critically in facilitating such varying interpretations of Korean masculine eroticism. In *Death 24X a Second*, Laura Mulvey (2006) analyzes her theories of the "male gaze" in relation to new entertainment technologies. According to Mulvey, the new technologies which allow viewers to stop, start, rewind, and fast-forward the videos at will, challenge neatly ordered patterns of temporality in films. The uncanny jumble of time occurring through new media technologies creates space for the spectators' consciousness to exert themselves in between the video's frames. In other words, Mulvey argues that spectators' ability to physically control the narrative flow makes the film's temporality jagged and uneven, leaving space for feminist intervention in visual media. I see Rakuten Viki's timed comments serving a similar purpose for the transnational Korean drama viewers. It serves as a digitally liminal space to share one's most intimate desires and fantasies. It creates digital personas of Hallyu fans that turn the solitary act of watching Korean television dramas into a

communal activity. The timed comments make debates appear to occur in real-time and any viewer watching the show in the future can partake in a debate by just typing their thoughts while streaming the content.

Many Hallyu fans elect to participate in the discussions on the website instead of focusing on the dramas and one's own visual pleasures in solitude. Digital personas come to append to corporeal beings. The convergence between the digital and the corporeal creates transnational intimacies among the viewers that are rooted in their desires for Korean men. However, do these digital spaces subvert the "male gaze" in their entirety? I thus complicate Mulvey's notion that viewers' power over the temporality of films/media revolutionizes the power dynamic between the viewer and the viewed. In some sense, I agree with Mulvey that it gives all viewers – not just men – the power of the gaze. By skipping, playing-back, and pausing the visual media, viewers can assert their desires and pleasures more forcefully onto films. Furthermore, through online spaces, they can create intimate connections with each other as well as with the subjects of the film in ways that were not possible through television sets or cinema. However, that does not necessarily subvert the power hierarchy between the viewer and the subjects being viewed. In the case of Hallyu, there is a hierarchy – albeit not absolute – between the viewing Hallyu fans and the viewed Korean men whereby the former wields power over the latter. In the following section, I will examine how such power dynamics between the viewer and the viewed operate in online discussion forums catered towards Hallyu fans.

Online Fan Forum Soompi

Soompi is "the world's largest and longest-running English online media providing

complete coverage of Korean popular culture."[25] The site description says it was created in 1998 by a single K-pop fan residing in Los Angeles named Susan Kang in order to share K-pop news with other fans living in the US. According to Kang, she only created the website as a hobby and not for profit, so when it began growing in size, she paid out of her own pocket for additional servers and enlisted the help of some fans who volunteered their technical expertise (Garcia 2010). However, when the website began growing exponentially and it became too expensive to pay out of her own pocket to sustain the website, Kang looked for advertisement sponsorship to sustain the expenses of running the website that had 80,000 people visiting it regularly (Garcia 2010). Approximately ten years after its inception, the company was consecutively bought by various entertainment companies such as Crunchyroll, an animation streaming website, and Rakuten Viki, the above-mentioned Korean television drama streaming website. From my research, it is not entirely clear how Soompi is garnering profit after it was acquired by Rakuten Viki. The website has very limited advertisements and it does not have any subscription services. From a single-person operated website, now it has grown to a multi-national enterprise with offices in both San Francisco and Seoul as well as editors and contributors from all parts of the world. It boasts users from 150 countries, making it a transnational hub of online Korean popular culture fandom. In this digital space, transnational fans share their desires, and those shared desires influence some Hallyu fans' "lived-realities."

One of the ways that Soompi serves its transnational users is by providing ways for the fans to watch the dramas "in real-time." With few exceptions, official channels of transnational media have varying degrees of "temporal lag" between the airing of the media in its "country of origin" and abroad. These temporal lags would be used to dub, subtitle, and edit the television

[25] For more information, visit: https://www.soompi.com/

shows for the foreign audience. Especially in the case of Korean television dramas, due to their near "live production" style of filming, some degree of the time difference between the dramas airing in Korea and being made available in other countries is paramount. However, some Hallyu fans use online fan spaces to bypass such "temporal lag" and create increasingly efficient time/space compressions. Constable (2007) states,

> Part of the tension and also the appeal of the Internet are derived from the fact that it is a tool that creates an increasingly efficient time/space compression, rendering it possible for more people to communicate faster and to establish broader social contacts than would otherwise be possible through simple print medium and the postal service (266).

For instance, demanding immediate gratification of their emotional desires, some transnational Hallyu fans utilize Soompi to gain immediate access to the dramas. More specifically, Hallyu fans share online links where the dramas can be illegally watched as they are being broadcast in Korea. While they watch the dramas in real-time, they screen-capture the drama scenes and talk about it in real-time at online forums like Soompi. This sharing of illegal streaming links is one of the appeals of Soompi for the transnational Hallyu fans, but to the producers and corporations that need to profit from official channels of Hallyu consumption, these fan sites produce quandaries which can neither be abolished nor approved.

As a new episode of *My Love from the Star* was about to start airing in Korea, one commenter on Soompi addressed other fans in the Soompi drama forum: "Finally the long

awaited ep14 about to start! Happy watching *yorobeun* [Korean word for everyone] [sic]."[26] The fans who were watching the dramas began live-commenting and posting copious screen-captures of the dramas. "I too love reading the comments it's like hearing all LIVE [sic]," one commenter proclaimed. Indeed, the endless streams of screen-captures and minute-by-minute commentary about the scenes made the drama forum read like a drama script. The dramas are filmed in advance of it being broadcast so it is not "live" per se but the transnational fans referred to watching the dramas in Korean time as "live." Viewing it "live" brings with it the privilege of experiencing emotional tingles and heartaches and sharing those emotions as they are being simultaneously experienced by others around the world. Therefore, the sense of "live" in these online drama forums does not just refer to the dramas themselves but also to the sharing of raw emotions with each other as they are being concurrently felt by other fans. As indicated in these fan activities, online spaces create efficient time-space compression.

However, the main problem with such live-streaming is that these dramas are not subtitled. Some scholars argue that due to language barriers, transnational media often primarily circulate among those with shared linguistic cultures: thus, for instance, Francophone countries have their own web of transnational media while Anglophone cultures have their own market (Chalaby 2005). Such theories emphasize that linguistic comprehension is essential to the popularity of transnational media. However, as seen in these live streaming of Korean dramas, language is not as fundamental in the success of emotion-driven entertainment like Korean television dramas. As indicated in the above example, some Hallyu fans watched the dramas in real-time without any subtitles but they claimed, "YES it was AWESOME even though I didn't

[26] Refer to https://forums.soompi.com/en/topic/337069-drama-2013-14-you-who-came-from-the-stars my-love-from-another-star-%E2%98%85-%EB%B3%84%EC%97%90%EC%84%9C-%EC%98%A8-%EA%B7%B8%EB%8C%80/ for the full extent of fan activity during "real time" streaming of the dramas.

understand most of it lol. But loving it. Can't wait for subs/recaps [sic]," "I don't understand anything…but somehow I could understand the whole storyline. The emotion that Min Joon and Song Yi were feeling…it was felt by me. It was just wow…bravo [sic]."[27] Emotional connection overrode the linguistic and cultural understanding of Korean television dramas. Even without a detailed understanding of the plot and the lines, the viewers claimed to not only understand and feel the drama but also to enjoy it. Despite the language barrier, they formed some type of emotional bond with the drama.

Granted, not all transnational media can be consumed purely through emotional understanding. For example, one would not be able to claim that one "understood" news reports without understanding any of the languages in which the news was conveyed. However, this is possible for Korean television dramas because they are melodramas. As I have mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Williams (1991) describes melodramas as "body genres." Along with horror films and pornography, melodramas are genres of entertainment that are not just visually entertaining but also entertaining by engaging other senses of the body. The emotion-driven quality of melodramas makes Korean television dramas comprehensible to fans even without subtitles or knowledge of the Korean language.

Based on their emotion-driven understanding of the dramas, Hallyu fans complicate the binary between fantasy and reality. Korean television dramas are not known for their "realistic" depictions; for their critics, this is an aspect that gives Korean television dramas (women's genre as some would call it) the most material for critique and derision. For instance, according to one commenter, "I think it's pretty funny that Korean drama watchers would complain about plot

[27] Refer to https://forums.soompi.com/en/topic/337069-drama-2013-14-you-who-came-from-the-stars my-love-from-another-star-%E2%98%85-%EB%B3%84%EC%97%90%EC%84%9C-%EC%98%A8-%EA%B7%B8%EB%8C%80/ for the full extent of fan activity during "real time" streaming of the dramas.

holes. Like I've said before if you're looking for realism watch HBO."[28] Korean dramas are juxtaposed with large-scale and meticulously detailed US television series produced by HBO and the latter is deemed superior to the former. The commenter implies that to be entertained by Korean television dramas, one has to be somewhat "illogical." During my field research, I came across multiple incredulous people (mostly men) who remarked at how stupid they thought the Korean dramas and their female viewers were. However, as the following comment shows, the primary pleasure of Korean television dramas does not come from their "realistic depiction" of everyday life. They come from a detailed analysis of emotions, particularly emotions of love. According to one online commenter,

> No. (my defence of kdramas, now) I've heard this argument more than I care to, and I think it just ignores the qualitative difference between the media. If kdrama were HBO-style, that subtle thing that makes kdramas what they are would be erased. Every time I've tried to watch an HBO show, after pushing myself through it, I realised I just had to stop, because it was making me die inside. Five seconds don't go by without foul language, innuendo, crass sexual references, violence, gore. The realism I want is not the HBO kind. To me, kdramas have always offered emotional realism, and I find that the more compelling storytelling. […] I would also argue that what HBO depicts is only a slice of the realism spectrum. Nothing in my world, that I've ever seen or experienced, has ever resembled anything in one of its shows. Sure, I'll agree it's grittier and maybe edgier, but that doesn't really make it better or

[28] Refer to http://www.dramabeans.com/2016/04/descended-from-the-sun-episode-15/

more realistic [sic].[29]

Emotional connections create emotional realities. Many other online comments echoed the above sentiment stating, "And I love the subtlety kdramas offer […] HBO would not do that, or know how to do that. I could go on and on, but I will stop here," and "HBO caters to a mostly male American audience, who is so far removed from their emotional core, that shock and awe is the only thing that gets them." In these comments, HBO serials and Korean television dramas are pitted against each other as opposite ends of the entertainment spectrum. The former is cast as an art of masculine sexuality and edginess while the latter comes to stand for feminine subtlety and emotionality. This debate, which repeated itself in various forms throughout the Korean drama fan forums, is an indicator that the transnational fans are using Hallyu dramas to create their fantasies, especially as they pertain to eroticism and masculinity. At the same time, these commentators reinscribe the binary between femininity and masculinity.

The comments left by Hallyu fans state that HBO shows push them to "die inside" with their explicit sexual scenes. According to these fan comments, Korean dramas portray erotic desires through the subtlety of romance, while HBO shows utilize "crass sexual references" and are incapable of erotic subtlety. Such distinctions are deeply gendered since the comments suggest HBO shows are made for "male American audience" while implying Korean television dramas are made for a female audience. Although that is not always the case (all genders watch *Game of Thrones* as well as Korean television dramas), the argument is laid out in such a gendered manner to emphasize female fans' dissatisfaction regarding their experiences with male sexuality. Lauren Berlant (2008) terms such dissatisfactions instances of the "female complaint"

[29] Refer to http://www.dramabeans.com/2016/04/descended-from-the-sun-episode-15/

that stem from women's disappointment in the tenuous relationship between erotic fantasies and "reality" of intimate relationships.

The viewers of melodramatic television dramas appear to prioritize "psychological reality" over "externally perceptible social reality" (Ang and Couling 1985). In the context of Hallyu dramas, by referring to them as "real" Hallyu fans do not mean that Korean television dramas reflect individual experiences of love. They mean that the emotions conveyed through the dramas can be felt within the viewers' bodies like "real" phenomena – a la Williams (1991) notion of melodramas as "body genres." Here, I am not suggesting the foundationalism of the body and corporeality. Rather, I am suggesting that the commentators and my informants seemed to go beyond the dichotomy of the "real" and fiction to interpret Korean television dramas through their visceral emotional responses. One viewer commented, "I just cried and cried on the latter part of the episode. The plot seems a bit unrealistic but the feelings, oh my gosh, the emotions is just so raw [sic]."[30] The raw pain of romantic heartbreaks depicted in Korean dramas is more "real" to the commenters than the corporeality of HBO depictions of romance. To some Hallyu fans who frequent the online fan forums, whether or not a drama is "realistic" depends not on their adherence to the laws that govern our everyday lives, but on whether they successfully move the viewers' hearts (emotions). Hallyu fans destabilize the normative binary between the fantasy world and the "real" world. Not only do they deem the fantastical images of eroticism in the Korean dramas "real," they also incorporate the fantasies into their experiences through Hallyu tourism. Hence, what Ang calls "psychological reality" and "externally perceptible social reality" are not in opposition to each other, but, instead, converge through the Hallyu fans' digital activities and Hallyu tourism.

[30] Refer to http://www.dramabeans.com/2016/04/descended-from-the-sun-episode-15/

It is important to note that just because Hallyu fans prefer Korean dramas' depiction of intimacy over that of HBO's does not mean that they are uninterested in sexual eroticism. At times, they expressed desires and fantasized about steamy intimate scenes between the drama couples. One viewer commented, "I was screaming like crazy when they kissed. My mum must have thought I'm crazy."[31] What makes sexual scenes in Korean dramas acceptable while HBO sexuality is criticized by the same people as being too edgy? I posit that there are two reasons: first, sexual scenes in Korean dramas are supplementary to depictions of romance, whereas, in HBO shows, explicit sexuality is one of their primary spectacles. Second, I contend that the fan-preference for scenes of intimacy in Korean dramas is related to transnational audiences' assumptions about "safe" Korean masculinity. Such discourses about Korean masculinity can be found on Soompi.

In Soompi, there are several fora that are exclusively dedicated to discussions about dating Korean men.[32] In addition to facilitating transnational intimacies among Hallyu fans, Soompi also serves as a space where Hallyu fans can discuss their erotic desires and experiences regarding being intimate with Korean men. Hallyu fans who personally experienced dating Korean men and others who want to experience it in the future share their fantasies and experiences in these forums. In these discussions, Korean men are not deemed "traditionally" masculine: "Korean-ness" and masculinity are portrayed as antithetical categories. According to some online comments,

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[31] Refer to https://forums.soompi.com/en/topic/337069-drama-2013-14-you-who-came-from-the-stars my-love-from-another-star-%E2%98%85-%EB%B3%84%EC%97%90%EC%84%9C-%EC%98%A8-%EA%B7%B8%EB%8C%80/ for the full extent of fan activity during "real time" streaming of the dramas.

[32] For example, visit: https://forums.soompi.com/en/topic/287738-dating-korean-guy/ or https://forums.soompi.com/en/topic/288778-how-come-some-girls-think-that-korean-guys-are-better-than-other-asian-guys/

> I know of many girls on twitter, tumblr, and in real life that have this view of Korean men, that they're all good looking and they all buy their girlfriend expensive gifts and their all this and that; only good things.
> Maybe *some* Korean men are like this but from my knowledge, it's rare and it's certainly a huge misconception from K-entertainment fangirls that Korean men are the ultimate boyfriends because men are men.[33]

> I wish girls would realize that a Korean guy is a guy before he is Korean.
> All the douchy things that other guys do, a Korean guy is likely to do too.
> They're not all sweet and won't run to the ends of the world and back just to cheer up their girl like in the kdramas. They're not all drop-dead gorgeous sons of chaebol owners who are foolishly in love with a plain, down-to-earth girl. So girls, don't be fooled by the kdrama industry any longer!!!![34]

When the commenters say "men are men," the word "men" here becomes equivalent to sexual desires devoid of romanticism. The notion that "men are men" is premised on a sharply gendered and binary distinction between sexual desires and romantic desires. The above commentators claim that Hallyu fans who fantasize about romantic Korean men deem Korean men as exceptions to the purported rule that "men are men." In other words, in some Hallyu fans' minds, Korean men's supposedly romantic nature separates them from men of other nationalities who

[33] For the full discussion, visit: https://forums.soompi.com/en/topic/287738-dating-korean-guy/

[34] For the full discussion, visit https://forums.soompi.com/en/topic/287738-dating-korean-guy/

are purportedly more sexual than romantic.

However, according to some commenters, it is not that they specifically desire Korean men: the men they desire just happen to be Korean. For example, one commenter stated, "Why do you think women are so shallow? We dream of a guy who is going to be smart and kind, romantic, and treat us nicely. If I find a Korean guy like that, then the fact he is Korean will be an added bonus."[35] In essence, these commenters argue that they desire Korean men not simply because they are Korean but because their Korean-ness is associated with romanticism that potentially overrides the disappointing qualities of "men." My informants and the Hallyu fans who commented online made a connection between Korean-ness and romanticism due to the fictional characters depicted in Korean dramas. Their fantasies about Korean men extended the soft masculine qualities of the fictional drama heroes onto the Korean men living in Korea.

Korean men are desired because of their (supposedly) restrained sexuality combined with "feminine"-like emotional expressiveness. Some Hallyu fans assume that soft masculinity and its intermixture of feminine and masculine qualities is representative of normative masculinity in Korea. "Soft" masculinity – despite being popular among the Hallyu fans – comes with a stigma. For example, one fan on the online forum questioned, "What would I be curious about: Does he have a small penis? You know what they say about Asians right." In this comment, the "soft" masculine and romantic qualities of Korean television drama heroes are merged into racist stereotypes of Asian men that portray them as effeminate and sexually incompetent (I elaborate on this in Chapter 5). Fantasies, stereotypes, and personal experiences converge to reify the notion that Korean men embody "liminal" masculinity. However, Asian men's supposed sexual liminality or restraint did not dissuade my Hallyu tourist informants from seeking intimate

[35] Ibid.

relationships with Korean men. Rather, such sexual restraint was the reason my informants, as well as the Hallyu fans online, stated as the cause of their desires for Korean men.

Valentine (2006) argues the major shortcoming of the internet is that it cannot substitute for the physical sensations of intimate touching. In Hallyu fan forums, however, emotional touching and physical touching are not entirely different sensations. In this regard, physical intimacy is not just limited to the actual corporeal proximity of one body to another. Hence, the Hallyu fans who frequent the online spaces complicate the argument that the internet is inadequate in conveying the tactility of corporeal intimacy. In this sense, these digital spaces serve not as inadequate substitutes for physical intimacy but, instead, facilitate the expansion of fans' fantasies and erotic longing for Korean men. Through the mediated erotics of digital Hallyu spaces, some fans destabilize the binary between fantasy versus reality as well as the supposed binary between digital versus corporeal.

Conclusion

The transnational fans of Korean television dramas find multiple online spaces through which to form transnational intimacies with one another. Since their love for Korean television dramas is still considered a marginal pastime activity in their cultures and home countries, they venture into the digital world to find others who share and understand their passion for Korean dramas and Korean men. In this chapter, I analyzed three online venues through which transnational fans form transnational intimacy with other fans. These digital intimacies are rooted in their erotic desires for, and fantasies about, Korean men. I suggested that intimacy, though often thought of as a phenomenon that exists between physically proximal beings, is, in fact, something that is possible through people who are not only physically apart but also has no

relations outside of the digital sphere.

Although the type of transnational intimacies that these online spaces garner are different from each other, they are similar in that all of them constitute a venue for fans to express their desires for Korean men. Whether it is the YouTube comment section, Soompi forums or Viki timed comments, the fans express their desire for Korean men and the type of romance that they will hypothetically provide. The conversations and debates that take place in these online spaces echo the sentiments of Hallyu tourists whom I interviewed for this research. They exemplify the convergence of fantasy and experience for the Hallyu fans. Fantasies are not merely *incorporated* into the viewers' experiences; instead, they *create* realities by shaping the erotic desires and actions of Hallyu fans.

This convergence of fantasy and "reality" is important because of what it signifies for the transnational perception of Korean masculinity. Both the online fan narratives as well as my Hallyu tourist informants appeared to idealize and objectify Korean men in similar ways. Online fans are physically distant from Korean men so they appeared to rely on digital spaces to feel proximate with them. Based on the comments posted by some fans, they used these digital spaces to proclaim their desires for Korean men and to share such desires with other fans. The fans' comments expressed how they derived physical pleasure in addition to visual pleasure from watching Korean television dramas. Their viewing of Korean men's restrained sexuality in these dramas garnered fans' corporeal responses in the form of heartaches, heartbreaks, and shedding of tears as well as screaming for joy. Such corporeal responses to Korean television dramas reach their pinnacle in the form of Hallyu tourism. In other words, the dramas are so effective in "touching" the viewers that they travel to Korea as Hallyu tourists. One might argue that viewers have to physically come in contact with situations, objects, and subjects in order to "fully"

become intimate with those objects, cultures, and beings. For example, hearing the crispness of food through television and imagining its texture is a different experience from actually touching, eating, and smelling the food in person. Both are corporeal experiences but in different ways. This is why Hallyu tourists visit Korea in person after seeing the dramas. If new media were able to substitute for absolutely every physical and emotive human encounters, Hallyu tourism would not exist. Emotions are transferable through media, and these mediated emotions are not just reliant on the textual or the visual; they are multi-sensorial. Nonetheless, there is both tension and intersection between the mediated intimacies and that of in-person experiences because significant parts of life experiences can only still be "fully" felt through in-person encounters. Hence, in the following chapter, I analyze Hallyu tourists' experiences of physical intimacies with Korean men in "real life" and how these intimacies complicate their perceptions of Korean masculinity.

Chapter 5

The Politics of Interracial Relationships and Hallyu Tourists' Racialized Erotic Desires

In Chapter 4, I analyzed digital Hallyu spaces and how some Hallyu fans used these spaces to discuss their erotic fantasies about Korean men. Some Hallyu fans who commented online described Korean men as "soft" and "sexually passive." These commenters contrasted such fantasies about Korean men with the purported hypersexuality of "Western" men. These binaristic conceptions of "East" and the "West" are problematic due to their roots in Orientalism and their disregard for the complex history of migration and movement across nations, cultures, and geographies. However, such binaries still proliferated in online fan forums as well as among my Hallyu tourist informants' discourses regarding sexuality and gender.

Why do such binaristic discourses exist? More specifically, why does the "West" uphold itself as a bastion of (sexual) liberation while characterizing the "East" as repressed? Women experience social inhibitions on their sexualities in both the "East" and the "West." For example, in the late twentieth century, some Japanese women traveled to the US to have sexual relationships with "Western" white and Black men because they felt Japanese culture oppressed women and limited their sexual freedom (Kelsky 1999). On the other hand, white women who traveled to Asia throughout US history argued that they felt more liberated in Asia both socially and sexually speaking (Yoshihara 2002). Despite women's complex experiences with travel and sexual freedom, "Western" characterizations of the "East" as sexually oppressive persist: the "East" is still envisioned as a conservative culture with repressed sexuality and effeminate docility while the "West" is deemed a culture of freedom. For example, Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) analyzes US discourse surrounding the Iraq War in which the US government and the media

legitimized the war by saying that Iraqi women needed to be "saved" from (sexual) oppression. Similarly, Gina Marchetti (1994) claims that Hollywood depictions of interracial relationships between Asian women and "Western" men often depict white men "saving" Asian women from their oppressive cultures.

Furthermore, romance, in Eurocentric conceptions, has often been associated with Whiteness and modernity. From such perspectives, romance is closely tied to civilization, individualism, and agency. However, I contend that romance is neither inherently tied to modernity nor Whiteness. Individual romantic desires intersect with politics of race, gender, class, and transnationality to create complex romances that cannot be essentialized through the East-West binary. For instance, Lieba Faier's (2007) research indicates that in Japan, Filipina sex workers who marry Japanese men describe their transnationality through modernist conceptions of love as a mode of self-making. In other words, they describe and legitimize their transnationality by expounding on their love for their husbands. According to Faier, for the Filipina women who marry Japanese men, love stands as "A term of global self-making: at once a language and a set of conditions through which these women articulated globally recognizable forms of agency and subjectivity within transnational relations of power" (149). In such cases, romance goes beyond simple self-actualization: it becomes a method through which migrants seek to become "recognizable" as transnational subjects.

Unlike the Filipina women in Faier's research or marriage migrants at large (Eggebø 2013), my Hallyu tourist informants were not "pressured" to justify their transnational travels through discourses of romance. As tourists, their transnational erotic desires were not scrutinized to the same extent as those of marriage migrants. For my informants, romance was a touristic pleasure that they had the privilege of enjoying through their transnational travels. However, I do

not suggest that my Hallyu tourist informants' transnational erotic desires were simplistic: their erotic desires intersected with nationality, race, and gender to complicate their transnational relationships with their Korean male partners.

The Hallyu tourists whose discourses I examine in this chapter – those who viewed Korean men as ideal romantic partners and visited Korea to engage with them on an intimate level – comprise only one segment of a larger Hallyu tourist population. Even among the young female Hallyu fans who I interviewed, not all of them visited Korea with desires and intentions to date Korean men. Based on my field research, those who held romantic desires for Korean men were more significantly influenced by television dramas than K-pop. Although K-pop and Korean dramas cannot be separated definitively because of the overlap of performers between the two genres, there are some differences between the motivations of Hallyu tourists in traveling to Korea depending on the content that inspired them. For instance, based on my field research, while K-pop fans who came to Korea as tourists did not extend their love for the idols to Koreans at large, the Korean television drama tourists did exactly that. Liew Kai Khiun (2011) argues K-pop fans practice "cover dancing" where they imitate the dance performances of the K-pop stars and compete with each other to see who can become the most identical to the stars. Meanwhile, scholarship indicates that Korean drama fans develop feelings for, and imagine intimacies with, Korean men (Vu and Lee 2013, Takeda 2014). In other words, K-pop fandom is an idolization of the individual idols, while Korean television drama fandom is a love affair with the emotions associated with Korean men.

The difference between the two fandoms can also be delineated in terms of gender. Based on my participant-observations, K-pop tourism was not as female-dominant as Korean television drama tourism. As Eun-Young Kim (2013a) claims, there is a significant number of male K-pop

fans who perform in cover dance groups and attend concerts of their favorite idols. However, Korean television drama tourists consisted predominantly of women.

Not all Hallyu tourists are women, but Hallyu tourists or fans are nonetheless feminized in online discourses surrounding Hallyu. For example, in Urban Dictionary – a crowdsourced online English dictionary – "Kpop fangirls" (*ppa-su-ni*) are described as "little creatures who scream like animals at concerts for their biases/male idols that they love and are too blinded to consider lusting about anything else. They constantly dream about this dream man and being their wife, and write extremely interesting fanfictions" (Oh 2015a, 62). The definition describes Hallyu tourists and fans as heterosexual women who are blinded by love and lust for Korean male celebrities. In a generically sexist method used to demean women, "fangirls" are described as irrational beings who are only driven by their emotions.

In my research, I focused on Hallyu fans who are heterosexual cis women, not to reinforce the gender-stereotyping and stigmatizing of fandoms, but because they were the most accessible group of Hallyu fans for me as a researcher. My identity as an ethnically Korean woman researcher must be taken into account regarding the significant gender imbalance in my research subjects. Men were much less willing to state that they were Hallyu tourists. Only in the privacy of conversing with me or after a few days of us knowing each other would men sheepishly acknowledge that they came to Korea as fans. In contrast, women admitted and were eager to share their experiences with me from the beginning.

My informants expected "real-life" Korean men to reflect the ways they were portrayed in Korean dramas: romantic, sensitive, emotional, and caring. Although these expectations created romantic demands for Korean men in the global heterosexual dating scene like never before, some of the expectations resembled and reproduced Orientalist stereotypes of Asian men.

Details regarding stereotypes of Asian men may differ from nation to nation. However, as I will analyze later in this chapter, among my informants, there were also some similarities regarding the stereotypes they possessed about (East) Asian men. In other words, Korean television dramas did not necessarily challenge the negative "Western" stereotypes of Asian masculinity, but instead, they altered some of my informants' points of view so that those same stereotypes now manifested as "desirable" traits of Asian masculinity.

Throughout US history, Asian men have been considered effeminate, weak, and less virile. Ironically, at the same time that they were desexualized, they were also feared, as evidenced by discourses of the "yellow peril" whereby Asian men were represented as threats to white women's sexual purity. Nonetheless, whether they were effeminized or feared for being a threat to white femininity, they were categorized as sexually "deviant" compared to heterosexual white men (Jun 2011). Due to their purported sexual "deviance," they were unpopular in the "Western" dating scene (Nguyen 2014). For instance, it is reported that Asian men, along with Black women, are one of the least popular groups of people on online dating applications in the US (McClintock 2010). Even now in the twenty-first century, popular depictions of Asian men in Hollywood continue to feed into negative stereotypes (Chua and Fujino 1999). These negative and highly-racialized stereotypes about Asian men are echoed in the "Western" popular culture critics' analyses of male Hallyu stars. The same Korean male celebrities dubbed as emotionally sensitive and caringly delicate by Korean/Asian critics are harshly critiqued in the "West" as weak knock-off versions of US/Western masculinity (Shin 2009).

According to Celine Parrenas Shimizu (2012), such images of Asian men in popular culture and the racialized interpretations of them by "Western" critics should not merely be dismissed as racist. Rather, Parrenas Shimizu suggests that feminists should uphold these

depictions of Asian masculinity as ways in which hypermasculinity and patriarchy could be challenged. In other words, Parrenas Shimizu claims Hollywood's racist depiction of Asian men can be positively reinterpreted as depictions of "ethical masculinities." I agree with Parrenas Shimizu that "soft" and sexually restrained images of Asian men in media could subvert heteropatriarchy by offering egalitarian models of masculinity for men. However, I also believe that such "liminal" images, rather than just subverting heteropatriarchy, end up reaffirming preexisting stereotypes about Asian men's purportedly "deviant" and "effeminate" masculinities. For instance, my Hallyu tourist informants described their erotic desires for Korean men in ways that idealized them and at the same time perpetuated racialized stereotypes. What exactly were my Hallyu tourist informants looking for in Korean men? Why did they want to form intimate relations with Korean men? Furthermore, how did their "real life" experiences in Korea compare to their fantasies?

The erotic expectations of the Hallyu tourists with whom I worked were different from those of Korean women who watched Korean television dramas. On numerous occasions throughout my field research, I talked with Korean women about my research. As if they coordinated their responses, most of them, after hearing about my research, scoffed at the Hallyu tourists who traveled to Korea to form intimate relations with Korean men. One Korean woman I talked to said, "Well, if they expect to find Korean men in real life who are like the drama characters, they are in for a rude awakening. Korean men in real life are nothing like the fictional characters in the dramas." Herein lay the difference between the erotic expectations of my Hallyu tourist informants and that of my Korean women informants. Korean women whom I talked to said they watched the television dramas because these fictional stories showed how men and romantic relationships could be in an ideal world. They did not think that these television dramas

reflected romantic relationships with Korean men in "real life." However, my Hallyu tourist informants assumed (or hoped) that what they saw on the television dramas *must be* true reflections of how Korean men are in "real life." They explicitly traveled to Korea because they wholeheartedly believed and hoped that the fictional representations of Korean men and romance are accurate reflections of "real life."

The points at which Korean women and Hallyu tourists whom I worked with derived pleasure from Korean television dramas were different. Much like the women in Janice Radway's (1984) research on readers of romance fictions who claimed they read these novels for a sense of "escape," the Korean women whom I talked to claimed that the pleasure of watching Korean television dramas came from a sense of "escape" into the drama-world. One Korean woman said, "We see Korean men in our everyday lives from our fathers and brothers to our boyfriends and colleagues. We see too many of them to believe that they are anything like the television drama characters. I watch the dramas because they show men that are nothing like the men in real life." This sentiment was echoed by other Korean women with whom I did my fieldwork. While these Korean women's pleasures derived from a sense of distinguishing between the television dramas and "real life," my Hallyu tourist informants' sense of pleasure came from the belief in the resonance between "reality" and television dramas in terms of how they depicted Korean men. Korean women wished to escape everyday life in Korea, while for the Hallyu tourists, everyday life in Korea was a place that they wanted to escape towards.

In this chapter, I analyze ways in which my informants' experiences in Korea revolved around multiple axes of racialized eroticisms. On the one hand, my informants sought intimate relationships with Korean men based on their racialized desires of Korean men. They would compare and contrast the purported traits of Korean masculinity to that of men "back home."

Hence, I analyze my informants' discourses and actions to answer the questions: Why did my informants distinguish between Korean men and men "back home"? What were the axes around which such binaries were created? How are intimacy, romance, and sexuality positioned in my informants' narratives?

However, before I analyze my informants' racialized desires for Korean men, I will first examine how my informants' erotic experiences in Korea were heavily influenced by *their own racial and national identities*. Even though my informants all came to Korea with desires to be intimate with Korean men, they had varied experiences in Korea based on their race and nationalities. Therefore, I find it essential to preface my analysis of my informants' fantasies and desires by highlighting that only *some* of my informants' fantasies became "realities" while others' fantasies were shattered by their racialized experiences in Korea. How did my informants' races and nationalities dictate their "real life" relationships with Korean men? And how were my informants being simultaneously racialized *by* Korean men?

The Disjuncture between Fantasy and Reality

Beth and Bella were Black identical twins from the US. They wore their hair natural and both of them sported square glasses with brown frames. On most days, they would appear from their bedrooms with color-coordinated clothing. For example, one particular day, they were both wearing pink short-sleeved pajama tops and matching pajama shorts. Over breakfast, Beth and Bella confided in me and some other tourists that they were planning on creating their own YouTube channel; they asked us what kind of topics they should focus on in their videos. One of the tourists suggested, "Maybe something about fashion, you guys are always so fashionable and you guys look like models!" Other women in the vicinity nodded in agreement. Another tourist

suggested, “You should make a video about dating Korean men. I think Black-Asian babies are so adorable.” Beth laughed and said,

> But it is harder to find Korean men interested in you if you are darker than Korean girls because the ideal of beauty here is to be white, so if girls who go opposite of that, they are not popular. I am not saying this to like talk about racism or anything or say that we [darker-skinned women] have it hard, but that is just the way it is. Even Southeast Asian girls are not popular here [sic].

Beth brought up the issue of race, but she attempted to depoliticize it by saying that she was not trying to talk about racism. Beth presumably tried to depoliticize her comments because most of the other Hallyu tourists who were participating in the conversation were white and she did not feel comfortable talking about racism with a group of white women. However, Beth brought up a very significant point about colorism and racism in Korea. According to her, Korean men did not desire women with darker complexions than “average” Korean women.

Korean men’s colorism and racism influenced my informants when they attempted to form intimate relations with Korean men. For example, Anna, a tourist from Sweden chimed in,

> Yeah I know! My friend is Iranian and Southeast Asian mixed [sic] and she used to love Korea and visit it so often and post pictures on Facebook, but all of a sudden all of that was erased from her Facebook and Instagram so I messaged her saying, yo what’s up with that? And she said she had really bad experiences in Korea with racism and I guess more than that, Korea in real life was not as she

> expected from the television dramas and she was disappointed with that you know? The Korean dramas let her survive the hard times she had in middle school and stuff and she had very grand image of Korea and the reality did not live up to expectations I guess [sic].

Anna was a white Swedish woman who, rather than being victimized by such instances of colorism, was privileged because of such standards. Based on my participant-observation, Anna was very popular among Korean men: she was never lacking in Korean suitors who wanted to take her out on dates. Despite her own experiences, Anna was still able to understand and validate her friend's experience with colorism in Korea. The colorism and racism in Korea turned Anna's friend away from Korean popular culture.

For Anna's friend, as a dark-skinned non-Korean woman, the reality of dating in Korea did not neatly align with the fantasies she created based on television dramas. Bella responded, "Well, fantasies are always different from reality, what did your friend expect?" Anna replied, "Actually, my imagination of Korea and the reality were pretty much the same. I am living my dream right now." Beth replied, "I actually kind of agree. I don't think Korea is *that* different from television. Like I wasn't shocked when I came to Korea. It felt pretty much the same as what I saw on television dramas and whatnot [sic]." Both Beth – a Black woman from the US – and Anna – a white Swedish tourist – said that they felt Korea was the same as they imagined. In that regard, race was not the only factor that determined my informants' experiences in Korea. Nonetheless, my informants' race were significant factors in whether their erotic fantasies were left intact or destroyed as they navigated the dating scene in Korea.

Many Korean scholars have analyzed the problem of rampant racism in Korea. For

example, Sang Bok Ha (2012) claims that foreigners have very different experiences in Korea based on their skin color. Ha draws on Franz Fanon's theories in *Black Skin, White Masks* where Fanon argues that due to colonial legacies, Antilles Blacks felt ashamed of their Blackness and instead espoused White supremacist ideologies. Ha claims that Koreans similarly suffer from a "Yellow skin, white mask" phenomenon whereby Koreans espouse the myth of White superiority. According to Ha, such ideologies were embedded in Korea in the nineteenth century when several Korean elites went to the US to acquire "modern" education and returned to Korea to spread "modern" knowledge, and along with it, US conceptions of racial hierarchy. Due to such ideologies, Black people – or people with darker skin colors than "typical" Koreans – came to symbolize inferiority in Korean racial discourses (Kim 2015a).

Although most researchers on Korean racism focus specifically on racism directed towards black and brown bodies, I suggest that Korean racism operates in more complex ways than merely being prejudiced against people with darker skin colors. Class, nationality, and gender intersect with racism to form a system of prejudice against certain "foreigners" in Korea. For example, even though my white informants were not experiencing the same type of racism in the Korean dating scene as my Black informants, they were still experiencing some form of racial bias when some Korean men mistakenly identified them as sex workers.

One day, one of my informants posed a question to me; this particular tourist was from Switzerland and had long light brown hair. She asked, "Do you know what "Russian" means in Korea?" It was clear from her tone of voice that she already knew the answer but was rhetorically asking me this question because she wanted to tell me something. Other tourists in the vicinity were also listening to our conversation, their eyes sparkled and they were smiling as if they knew the answer to the question as well. I asked, "I don't know, what does Russian mean

in Korea?" Several of my informants shouted, almost in unison, "It means, 'are you a prostitute?'" One of them explained, "You know prostitution is illegal in Korea, right? So Korean guys, when we are in clubs, ask us, "Are you Russian?" At first, I didn't know what it meant, but now I know! They were asking if I was a prostitute." One of my informants wondered aloud, "Do they actually want us to be prostitutes or are they asking because they don't want to engage with us if we are prostitutes?" None of us had an answer to that question. As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 6, a significant number of sex workers in Korea are white women from countries like Kazakhstan and Russia (Lee 2019), which is why my white informants were sometimes mistaken as sex workers. Women from Russia and Eastern European countries (along with South American and Southeast Asian women) travel to Korea to work in the sex industry because it guarantees a much higher pay than if they were working in their home countries.

In this context, it is not just one's race that factors into foreigner-discrimination in Korea, nationality also functions significantly. Thus, some Korean men equated "Russian" nationality with female hypersexuality and availability. Ironically, even though not all of my informants were from Russia, due to their whiteness and gender, they were sometimes mistaken for "Russians" or sex workers: in such instances, their whiteness did not grant them privileges of being white. Instead, they were stigmatized for their "overt" or phenotypic "foreignness." The privileges they felt and experienced as tourists from developed nations were temporarily erased through such exchanges with Korean men.

The above anecdotes reveal that there are multiple axes of racialization that shaped interactions between my informants and Korean men. While my black and brown informants were subjected to racism through the lack of opportunities to become intimate with Korean men, my white informants were subjected to a form of racialized bias by being perceived as sex

workers. Korean racism against darker-skinned-foreigners has a long history dating back to the era of Japanese colonialism and the Korean War (Kim 2015a). However, I posit that the racialized experiences of my white informants (being perceived as sex workers) are new phenomena that came with the rise of Korea's economic status in the twenty-first century. According to Erin Aeran Chung (2019), in contemporary Korea, new racial hierarchies are emerging due to the influx of migrant workers to Korea. I contend that the white sex workers in Korea are examples of migrant laborers who are creating new racial hierarchies in Korea. The nation's system of racial bias is intertwined with colorism, classism, sexism, and prejudice against certain nationalities.

As I have indicated thus far, my informants' racial identities shaped their experiences in Korea. Despite the racist and racialized ways in which my Hallyu tourist informants were treated by some Korean men, such treatments rarely seemed to deter them from pursuing their fantasies of intimate relations with Korean men. My informants possessed their own racialized erotic desires for Korean men and they would compare Korean men to men of other races or men "back home." What kind of erotic fantasies did by informants formulate with regard to Korean men? How did Korean television dramas inspire my informants to formulate essentialist binaries between Korean men and men of other races, nationalities, and ethnicities?

Korean Television Dramas and Ideal Masculinity

The Hallyu tourists with whom I did my fieldwork asserted that Korean men (potentially) offered a kind of romantic love that contrasted with that offered by men in their home countries. Elena, a Russian Hallyu tourist, claimed that she loved Korea based on the way it was depicted in the dramas. Elena had piercing blue eyes and very pale skin framed by dark black hair that

came down to the middle of her back. She was of medium height and, when I first met her, sported jean shorts and tight short sleeve pink shirt that clung to her body. During my stay at the guesthouse, I often observed her lounging on the dark brown sofa that lined the walls of the living room, which was in the middle of the guesthouse. The sofa faced a large screen that was hooked to a computer. It featured a non-stop cycle of YouTube videos featuring K-pop music videos or Korean dramas. Next to the screen was a small kitchen that included a microwave, electric kettle, and boxes of ramen which the guesthouse provided free of charge. The kitchen was littered every morning with instant ramen cups that tourists ate in their drunken stupor and then forgot to clean up, so the entire house constantly smelled of ramen. The elevator to the guesthouse was directly connected to the living room, so upon entering the hostel, one was immediately greeted by the people lounging on the sofa in the living room. Due to the unique structure of the guesthouse, it always felt inviting and friendly but, at the same time, it felt as though everyone was being constantly surveilled by the other guests who were sitting on the couch.

One day, while I was sitting on the sofa with Elena, she said to me, "I watch so many dramas at once. I watch more than five dramas at the same time so if I watch one a day throughout the week, I can wait for the new episodes easily. Of course, if I find older dramas, I binge-watch them with my mom." Elena's entire week was scheduled around her plans to watch Korean dramas. She beamed with delight while talking about her meticulous weekly plans to keep up-to-date on Korean dramas. When asked what drama she watched recently, Elena stated, "*Descendants of the Sun* was good. I love listening to the original soundtracks (OSTs). When I feel sad, I just turn on those *Descendants of the Sun* OSTs and I feel happy again. Whenever I hear the songs, it is like me falling in love all over again. Can you play it for me?" I fidgeted

with the remote control for the television to find the requested music video. When a long list of music videos popped up, Elena excitedly jumped up from the sofa and pointed to one particular music video. “That one, that one is my favorite.”

Elena and I silently listened to the *Descendants of the Sun* OST playing on a loop in the television hooked to the computer in the guesthouse living room. Elena dreamily remarked, “Song Joong Ki character [Captain Yu] in *Descendants of the Sun* is so bad because he is so perfect. Korean guys in dramas are so cute! And I guess in real life too. Russian guys can be caring but sometimes they say 'I am too man [sic] to do this ' but Korean guys don’t have that [problem]!” Elena compared the depiction of Korean men in dramas to the Russian men she encountered in her daily life in Russia. Korean men were “bad” because they raised her standards for how ideal romantic masculinity should look. However, it was a hard act to follow for the Russian men who Elena met in her everyday life in Russia. Elena claimed that Russian men refused to say or perform certain actions because they were too “effeminate.” Meanwhile, Korean men (as they are depicted in the dramas) would theoretically do anything to please their lovers. They made the real-life Russian men – who supposedly did not sacrifice their masculinity for love – pale in comparison.

I asked Elena, “Do you mean they [Russian men] are less loving?” “No, I don’t think that’s it. They definitely love us but… I don’t know how to describe it. I think… I think they can’t show their feelings and it makes me sad sometimes,” she said as she pouted. Romantic love and the way it is performed is culturally specific. Romantic love exists in different cultures; it just takes different shapes. Culturally-specific gender roles, as well as marriage and courtship traditions all, influence the way one expresses one’s feelings of love (Regis 1997). Juxtaposed with Elena’s idealized descriptions of Korean men, Russian men were described as unemotional

because of hegemonic discourses of masculinity in Russia which, she implied, stigmatized the overt expression of romantic emotions by men. Elena's complaints about "unemotional" and "macho" Russian men are examples of "female complaints." According to Lauren Berlant (2008), women feel disappointed by the disjuncture between their romantic fantasies and lived intimacies; such disappointments lead to what Berlant calls "female complaints." Elena's trip to Korea to form intimate relations with Korean men may have been her attempts to bridge the gap between her romantic fantasies and the realities of intimacy as she experienced them in her daily life.

Although romance, sex, and intimacy are not mutually exclusive, Elena described desirable Korean men through their supposed prioritization of emotional intimacy above sex. Elena continued, "But if they [Korean men] are like the drama guys, I would love to [date them] but I don't know what they would think of a Russian girl," Elena said "Russian girl" with a chuckle. "I mean even in the *Descendants of the Sun*, the waitress who tries to get between Song Joong Ki and Song Hye Kyo is Russian with her big boobs… Very sexual… I doubt Korean guys would want to date that kind of woman." In Elena's view, Korean men were not looking for sexual gratification. Based on the way they are depicted in the dramas, Elena believed Korean men see sexual women as just a hindrance and a hurdle for them to overcome to achieve the ideal romantic love. In the drama, the "Russian with her big boobs" is someone who symbolizes the potential of sex without emotional intimacy while the heroine Doctor Kang is someone with whom the hero feels romantic love. In the drama, the hero does not even look at the "Russian with her big boobs" because he only desires to be intimate with the heroine.

This distinction between sexual desires and emotional intimacy begs the question: are these desires actually mutually exclusive? Some scholars use "intimacy" to imply sexual

relationships or intercourse (Engelberg 2011, Berlant 2000) while others mean it in a broader sense of togetherness and affinity (Eggebø 2013). Throughout her essay on intimacy Berlant primarily uses the term as having a sexual meaning by arguing that the society creates politicized intimacies in which only certain images of intimacy gets accepted as the norm. The hegemonic fantasy of normative intimacies marginalizes those who conceive of, or express, intimacy differently. However, Berlant also leaves room for intimacy to be interpreted as something more than sexual relations.

My interpretation of intimacy goes beyond the sexual. Romantic love, sex, and intimacy all refer to different aspects of erotic relationships. I differentiate between the terms by defining romantic love and sex as individual encounters between two or more people which entail a spectrum of emotions and sexual acts. Intimacies include all levels of interpersonal erotic relationships and extend those frameworks to the analysis of the non-erotic. In other words, intimacies can occur between people (Berlant 2000) or even continents (Lowe 2015); it can occur in romantic and sexual ways or it could occur in violent and colonialist encounters. In intimate encounters, the subjects involved are profoundly impacted by the experiences whether they are erotic or not. In other words, romantic, sexual, erotic, and the intimate point to various scales of interpersonal encounters. In this regard, how could we interpret the intimate encounters between Korean men and my Hallyu tourist informants? How were these transnational intimacies shaped by the specter of non-Korean men (whom my informants constantly juxtaposed with their fantasies about Korean men)?

Fantasies Overriding Realities: Fictional "Korean Men" versus Men of Other Races

Various words that define newly popularized East Asian "alternative" masculinities

highlight their passivity particularly in terms of sex. For instance, both the Japanese "Herbivore masculinity" and Korean "Flower boy" gives off the connotation of flora and fauna; they are dissociated from corporeality or the meaty flesh. By being described as herbivorous and flower-like, these men are de-linked from the penis and are completely dissociated from sex acts. Furthermore, the adjective "soft" is also used to describe their depiction in media as well as their ways of life (Jung 2010b). The soft-ness as an adjective is an apt image used in contrast to the "rigid" and "macho" masculinity. The word "soft" is reminiscent of the way the non-erect male penis is described; when it is not erect or functioning sexually, it is colloquially referred to as "soft." Hence, similar to the words "herbivore" and "flower," the adjective "soft" to describe East Asian "alternative" masculinities effectively dissociate the masculine descriptions from the sexual or patriarchal assertion of physical powers. Although these descriptions apply to the depiction of men in Korean television dramas, they are not always suitable for describing Korean men in "real life."

Unsurprisingly, not all Korean men are always as they are depicted in Korean television dramas; at times they are violent as opposed to always romantic, gentle, and sexually restrained. Grace was a Swiss tourist who had long brown hair, tanned skin, and dark brown eyes. She loved wearing the clothes she bought in Korea. I occasionally went out to bars and clubs with her and observed Korean men asking her out on dates. When I first met Grace, she had a giant hickey – a bruise made by prolonged kissing on bare skin – on one side of her neck that she attempted to cover with makeup. One day while eating lunch with other Hallyu tourists, one of the tourists prodded her about her clubbing the night before because she supposedly separated from the rest of the Hallyu tourist group. Grace said,

So I was at the club with you guys and there was this Korean guy, totally my type, who was standing next to the bar. So I started making out with him in the club for like thirty minutes and I thought, yes! I am going to have sex tonight. But when we were leaving the club, I saw him crying! I mean he wasn't sobbing but I could see tears on his cheeks so I asked him in Korean 'Are you ok? Ex-girlfriend problems? Family problems?' But he said never mind so we were walking and then this Black guy is walking next to me out of nowhere and apparently he was Tanzanian living in Korea so I said, oh cool, my brother is living in Tanzania and we began talking. He spoke better Korean than me so I asked him if he could ask the Korean guy if he was ok, and the Tanzanian guy and the Korean guy with me exchanged words. I couldn't understand what they were saying but I could feel that it wasn't really friendly so I made the Korean guy walk with me to the other side of the road from the Tanzanian guy and we reached the hostel right? And I went inside but I felt like something was going to happen. I had that feeling, so I went out again and the Korean guy and Tanzanian guy were like this.

She imitated them grabbing each other by their collars and continued,

I was trying to break them up saying I don't want any trouble but the Tanzanian guy actually tried punching the Korean guy and all of a sudden, out of nowhere, the Korean guy had… what do you call them? They are not stones… oh, bricks! And he was throwing bricks at the Tanzanian guy and

> they were throwing it at each other in the middle of the street! I stepped in the middle and held the Korean guy like this.

Grace swung her arms around in front of her in a hugging motion. I asked if she had any intentions of meeting the Korean man featured in the story. “The Korean guy actually texted me just now asking me to go on a date with him again.” I asked, “Are you going to go? He sounds unstable and dangerous.” Grace, without any hesitation, said, “Why not, he doesn’t seem dangerous and he was my type!”

In this anecdote, Grace’s Korean love interest and a Black Tanzanian man were locked in fisticuffs. According to Grace, even though the Korean man and Grace were walking side by side on the street when the Korean man displayed a moment of emotionality, the Tanzanian man attempted to insert himself between Grace and the Korean man. He attempted to “steal” Grace away from the crying Korean man who was temporarily emasculated by his display of emotions. However, when the Tanzanian man swung the first blow, rather than backing down, the Korean man escalated the fight by throwing bricks in return. In this instance, the Korean man displayed a type of masculinity that was far from “soft” masculinity akin to the drama heroes. The fight was a racially-charged homosocial competition whereby the winner of the fight would “acquire” access to Grace regardless of her preferences or desires. In this instance, the Korean man was neither performing “soft” masculinity nor prioritizing Grace’s (the woman’s) desires; instead, through the physical altercation, he was asserting hypermasculine behavior that even endangered Grace by forcing her to intervene in the fight.

However, Grace was attracted to the Korean man before the fight, and even after the fight, she still chose the Korean man. In that sense, the Korean man ultimately “won” in the

competition with the Tanzanian man. This event is noteworthy because, as I analyze in Chapter 6, my Korean male informants often thought of themselves as unable to erotically compete against men of other races. As this example shows, contrary to my Korean male informants' assumptions, my Hallyu tourist informant chose the Korean man above the Tanzanian Black man. Even though the Korean man showed aggressive behavior that ran counter to the assumptions of Korean soft masculinity, it did not seem to bother Grace, who was still willing to go on dates with him after the incident. It also did not seem to bother the other Hallyu tourists who listened to the anecdote. They reacted to the story merely as an entertaining anecdote about dating life in Korea rather than a story of hypermasculinity that countered their idealistic perceptions of Korean men. One possible reason for their nonchalance was that the Korean man was not physically assaulting Grace (at least in this particular instance) but was fighting another man.

However, later on in the week when I interviewed Grace again after she went on another date with the Korean "brick-thrower," I found that even though the Korean man's physical power was turned towards her this time, it still did not bother her to the extent it would have had it been non-Korean men acting the same way. I had a follow-up interview with Grace a couple of days after I first heard the story about the brick-throwing incident. She was just about to go into the communal shower when I noticed small reddish-blue marks on her forearm and asked Grace what happened. "Oh it must have been that guy that I told you about, wait we can talk after I come out of the shower." I waited for her outside the communal shower room. She came out of the shower and started blow-drying her hair. The blow dryers were located in the hallway in between the hostel dormitory rooms. The hallway had a huge mirror on top of a wooden chest of drawers that held miscellaneous beauty products that past hostel guests had left behind. When

she finished blow-drying her hair and began styling it with a curling iron, she began talking.

> I'm not sure but I think it was the guy. You remember the guy I told you about? The one who got in a fight? I went on a date with him yesterday. I think he might have grabbed my wrist or something. I don't think it was even that hard but I bruise really easily so this happened.

Grace lightly rubbed her wrist. "Why did you give him another chance?" I asked, to which she said:

> Well, I didn't have any other dates planned because another Korean guy canceled on me and I didn't think he was that dangerous. He was in a mood the other night when he was throwing bricks you know? So I wanted to see him when he was not drunk. The date was not that great. He was still so possessive and giving me a hard time. He doesn't live in Seoul so he had to take the bus here and he initially said he had other business in Seoul and he is meeting me in between his other meetings but when we met he revealed that he didn't have any other plans. He rode the bus for three hours to Seoul just to meet me. That made me feel really pressured to give him something… have sex with him whatever, you know? So I just told him I had plans with my girlfriends and just came home. He wanted something more but I didn't feel like it.

Even though the Korean man was showing aggressive and possessive behavior towards her, Grace did not condemn his actions. This was surprising because previously, Grace told me that if and when men back home showed remotely coercive behaviors, she fought tooth and nail against them. She said she learned physical defense to ward them off, but she merely brushed off the Korean man's aggressiveness.

Although barely discussed by my informants, examples of Korean male-forcefulness do exist in Korean television dramas. One popular trope of Korean dramas is the "wrist-grabbing" scene: the drama hero would grab the heroine's wrist to stop her from walking away or to pull her towards him like a rag doll. Sometimes Korean dramas create iconic and symbolic scenes in which two different men in love with the heroine grab each of her wrists. They both grab her wrist and pull her towards opposite directions, asserting their power over the heroine who is emotionally and physically torn and rendered powerless between the two men. Although these scenes are portrayed as romantic (such portrayals are slowly changing with increased awareness in Korea regarding sexual assault), stripped from their rose-tinted effects, they are scenes of abuse. While I was talking to my informants, some of them mentioned these scenes and expressed their dissatisfaction at such —as they put it— "possessive nature" of Korean men. However, when they experienced it first-hand as Grace had, they contradicted themselves. Rather than lashing out or fighting with the Korean man who was being possessive and asserting control over her, Grace disregarded all the warning signs.

Joanna Elfving-Hwang (2011) explains that to women, Korean *kkonminam* (flower boy) masculinity represents "safe" masculinity because they openly behave in an effeminate manner. These men's comfortable adoption of effeminacy makes them appear less hierarchical or patriarchal and thereby "safer" compared to men of other races and ethnicities. Furthermore,

Asian American men have "long suffered from the stereotype of being weak, effeminate, math and science geeks, with little interest in [US] popular culture, whether music or sports—often in direct contrast to the stereotyped propensities of white and black American" (Jung 2010a, 234). Similarly, my informants did not perceive Korean men as dangerous as men of other races.

In Grace's anecdote, even though the Korean man fought with the Tanzanian man, and even bruised her arm by grabbing it too hard, she insisted that he was not dangerous. Korean men were considered "safe" or "weak" men incapable of performing (sexual) violence. In Grace's mind, the image of Korean "soft" masculinity depicted in Korean television dramas converged with stereotypes about Asian men's purported physical weakness so that, regardless of how Korean men acted in "real life," their actions were still interpreted as non-threatening. Fantasies derived from Korean television dramas fundamentally influenced the way Grace perceived her "real life" experiences with Korean men, even to the point where she reinterpreted the dangerous "real life" experience to fit her fantasies about "soft" Korean men. How do such fantasies complicate and at the same time reaffirm stereotypes about Asian male sexuality?

Desiring Korean Men's Restrained Sexualities but Making Fun of their "Small" Penis

In his research on gay pornography, Hoang Tan Nguyen (2014) claims that Asian men are almost exclusively cast in "bottom" roles rather than "top" roles, adhering to the stereotype of Asian men as effeminate and sexually passive. Their penises do not serve any purpose in the pornographic films because Asian men are strictly feminized and, thereby, symbolically castrated. Likewise, in Hallyu, Korean men's sex organs and sexuality are not the main reason they become erotically desirable subjects. For instance, actor Bae Yong Joon, popular for his soft masculine role in the Korean drama *Winter Sonata*, experienced a set-back in his fame when he

released a semi-nude photo-book in an attempt to change his public image from a soft and emotional man to muscular and macho man (Jung 2006). According to Sun Jung (2006), international fans who pined over Bae after seeing his romantic performances in the drama felt disappointed and appalled at his semi-nude photo book that revealed his physique because it was not what they desired in their imaginations of Bae or Korean men at large.

In Orientalist discourses, the "West" has historically assigned Asia with a feminine status that has varied from anywhere between "innocent maiden" of post-war South Korea to the "demon bitch" of Vietcong and communist China (Han and Ling 1998, 60). In juxtaposition to the feminization of Asia, the "West" has been deemed the "masculine White saviors" (Han and Ling 1998, 61). Such perceptions are reflected in countless Hollywood films that feature Asian women as a group of women whom the white men need to save from "inadequate" Asian men (Marchetti 1994). Although such media depictions are challenged by Korean television dramas, the stereotypes that permeate through such "Western" media depictions appeared to still be engrained in my informants' consciousness.

For instance, some of my informants used racialized discourses and preconceptions to describe Korean male sexuality. One of the interview sessions that occurred in the early morning hours of Saturday consisted of eight female Hallyu tourists from different parts of the world chatting over breakfast. They were from Sweden, Denmark, Dominican Republic, US, Australia, and Canada. They did not travel together but became friends by staying in the same hostel and by sharing similar interests in Korean pop culture and Korean men. One by one they stumbled out of their beds at nine in the morning, still in their pajamas. They came down from their rooms to the living room area that also served as a dining room. A long table in the middle of the living room featured various breakfast items such as slices of bread, jam and butter, orange juice,

coffee, and plastic plates and cups as well as plastic utensils. Small, uniformly designed square tables lined one part of the wall so that the guests could take their plates of food to these tables and eat their breakfast. Some of the women looked visibly tired with tousled hair and sleepy eyes, while others looked as though they had fallen straight into bed after coming from their night of partying. They had smudged makeup and were still wearing clothes that they wore the night before. Interview questions regarding Korean popular culture that usually sparked the interviews fell flat this time among this tired crowd of women.

However, the quiet interview session turned vociferous and the women's eyes begun to sparkle when the topic turned to their sexual experiences with Korean men.

> MJL: When did you guys get back home last night?
>
> Brittany (US): I think we came around five or six in the morning because we didn't find any guys. Grace on the other hand…
>
> Grace (Sweden): Let me tell you something surprising. This Korean guy I met yesterday… [at this point she dramatically lowered her voice and mouthed the words] had the biggest dick

When she dramatically lowered her voice and leaned into the crowd of listeners, everyone also leaned forwards in their chair to listen to what she had to say. As Grace said "had the biggest dick," she measured out the length of it in front of her breasts using both of her hands. Other participants laughed gleefully. The quiet and sleepy living room suddenly became noisy because of our group's sudden burst of laughter. Some of the Hallyu tourists laughed so hard at the penis story that one of them even fell off her barstool.

Helen (Dominican Republic): Wait, how big did you say it was?!

Grace: It was so big and wide that I thought he did something to it. I asked him and he said no but I think he did and just didn't tell me. It was surprising because he was Korean. You don't think they have that big of a penis you know?

Brittany: I mean I guess there are always that one in a million exceptions. How would he have sex with Korean girls or Asian girls with that big of a penis anyways?

Grace: So I would conclude by saying this. Swedish guys' dicks are like McDonalds. You always know what to expect so you are decently satisfied. Korean guys' dicks on the other hand… you never know what to expect

In the realm of US pornography, it is typically the Asian male penis that is associated with food items: for instance, East Asian men's penis is often derogatively referred to as the size and color of "eggrolls" (Nguyen 2014). However, in the above interview, the simile between food and penis was used to describe the Swedish male penis. Rather than being used in a derogative manner that "eggrolls" are used to demean East Asian male sex organs, my informant described Swedish male penis as McDonald's to emphasize the guaranteed satisfaction from sexual encounters with Swedish men. The underlying assumption that all women in this conversation shared was that Asian men were not well-endowed; as one of the tourists stated, the Asian man with a big penis was supposedly a "one in a million exception" to an otherwise not-so-well-endowed majority of Asian men. Grace was so astonished by the Korean man's "atypically" large

penis that, without considering the rudeness of the question, she even asked the Korean man whether his penis was "real" or if he had surgical procedures done on it to enlarge it. In the above interview, Korean men's sexual abilities were contrasted with those of Swedish men. More generally, my informants were comparing Korean men to men of other races literally through their penis sizes and figuratively through their phallic powers.

In such ways, my informants constantly compared Korean men to "Western" or "foreign" men.

> Grace: I like going to clubs in Asia and especially clubs that do not have many tourists.
>
> MJL: Why is that?
>
> Emily (Canada): I noticed the foreigners are so aggressive. I like going to clubs mainly with Koreans too.
>
> Grace: I am not saying the Korean men are weaker. I am not saying that. That is such a bad stereotype [eyeing me] but…but they are actually less strong. Foreign guys are more aggressive and much ruder than Korean guys. Even at home (Sweden), men do not take no for an answer. I had to punch some guys to get them to stop harassing me. My brothers even taught me how to defend myself because of those kind of men.
>
> Emily: Yeah, foreigners are so rude. The other night, one of them stuck their hand up my dress and this Korean guy saw it and made that fucker get off me.

In the context of this interview, "foreign men" referred to non-Asian men from "Western" countries where my informants hailed from. My informants expressed contempt for these men who seemed to know nothing more than brute force and sexual conquest. By calling men of other races "foreigners," they differentiated themselves from those men, some of whom were from the same countries as my informants. They were calling international tourists "foreign" as if they were speaking from the point of view of Koreans. They were not only complicating the binary between "foreign" and "familiar," but they were also presenting themselves as people who, through their supposed familiarity with Korean culture, were de facto Korean rather than "foreign."

Korean television dramas and the fantasies fostered by them complicate the simplistic binary of the East versus the West. At the same time, they do not completely demolish such binaries because some of the desires derived through Korean dramas stem from the purported East-West binary and the viewers' fascination with the "Other." Sun Jung (2010b) calls such desires "neo-Orientalism" which is "Western desire for the hybrid postmodern Other that is perceived as not quite primitive" (122). According to Chua Beng Huat (2008), Hallyu fans watch "foreign" Korean dramas because of their exotic allure. According to Chua, Hallyu fans maintain a certain amount of distance between themselves and the Korean culture depicted in the dramas because they interpret the dramas as "foreign" and exotic entertainment far removed from their "real life."

However, I disagree with Chua's claims: my informants' understanding of "foreign" and "familiar" appeared to be more complex as they went beyond national boundaries to affiliate themselves with Koreans rather than "foreigners." As the above interview suggests, intimacies cannot simply be explained through dichotomies of us versus the other or one's national

affiliations. Korean television dramas influenced the way my informants thought of their distance (or lack thereof) with Korea. In this interview, my informants described Korean men as protectors and gentlemen who do not sexually coerce or force women. On the other hand, "foreign men" were seen as sexual aggressors. Rather than associating themselves with the supposedly sex-hungry foreign male tourists, they preferred to be aligned with Korean men and their culture which "protects" women.

Thus far, in this chapter, I parsed through ways in which my informants created binaries between purportedly "soft" and romantic Korean men and the macho and hypersexual "Western" men. The fantasies were so strong that some of my informants reinterpreted "real life" situations to conform to their neatly delineated fantasies. My informants' fantasies about Korean men (i.e. romantic, "soft," and emotional) were rooted in Korean men's purported penchant for sexual restraint. According to my informants, such qualities supposedly made them different and superior to men "back home." My informants distinguished between romance and sex with the former attached to Korean masculinity and the latter as a descriptor of "Western" masculinities. In this context, how did my informants make sense of "real life" Korean men's overt sexualities that challenged their Korean drama-inspired fantasies?

In the following section, I analyze the sense of betrayal that my informants claimed to have felt when their racialized erotic fantasies were shattered by Korean men's overt sexualities. Do such senses of "betrayal" disclose the racism and the neo-Orientalism inherent in my informants' racialized erotic desires for Korean men? Or do they indicate my informants' disappointment at the fact that Korean masculinity failed to provide an alternative model to that of hypersexual and heteropatriarchal masculinities?

Feeling Betrayed by "Deceptive" Korean Masculinity

As I have argued in this dissertation, Korean television drama heroes, while practicing sexual restraint, express their erotic desires and romantic feelings for the heroines through caring and intimate acts such as tying the heroines' shoelaces. The Hallyu tourists I worked with perceived the Korean drama heroes' sexual restraints as romantic and desirable. Whereas the stereotype of Asian men's nominal sexuality usually serves to marginalize Asian men in the global dating scene (Nguyen 2014), for my informants, these purported traits made Korean men even more romantically appealing.

In such ways, a majority of the Hallyu tourists I worked with made distinctions between romantic and sexual relationships. For example, I interviewed Jessica at a cool, air-conditioned café. Jazz music played in the background and constant fizzing and clanking from the espresso machines blended into the music. The café was located on the second floor of a building overlooking a very busy street in Seoul. Several potted trees were placed here and there throughout the wood floor. Large slabs of roughly cut wood served as coffee tables and were matched with straw-woven seats. The naturalistic ambiance went nicely along with the highly refined menu the café served consisting of Belgian waffles, gelato, and hot chocolate all made with chocolate directly imported from Belgium. The café created a milieu of laid-back space where young and hip youths who frequented this part of Seoul could rest their weary legs. Jessica was a Danish woman in her early twenties who was so enraptured with Korean culture to the point of being a repeat visitor to Korea and being relatively fluent in Korean. She was short and plump with long, wispy blond hair. She had big blue eyes and rosy cheeks. When I was walking around the streets with her in Seoul, some Koreans unfamiliar with white features openly ogled at her and even told her that she looked like a porcelain doll. When we talked, she

frequently told me of her attraction towards Korean men:

> Jessica: I have been on several dates but I just had a few real boyfriends so far. My first kiss and sex was with my first boyfriend at 18. He was Danish.
>
> MJL: So you have dated one Danish guy so far?
>
> Jessica: Yeah. I think Danish guys are so boring.
>
> MJL: What exactly are you looking for when you go on dates with Korean men?
>
> Jessica: Mostly a relationship. It is fun to have sex and stuff but that is kind of like we are using each other. You know? It is not anything emotional or stuff like that. We just use each other and that is the end. Those things are totally different. If I have someone I really like, sex and all that stuff is not that important. We will have to do a long distance relationship, so naturally we are not going to have much sex. What matters is the heart and feelings and caring about each other enough to keep in contact through long distance.

Based on what Jessica said, intimacy was not necessarily a precursor to sexual relationships. Although many scholars equate intimacy with sex acts (Lin 2008), for Jessica, intimacy referred to a sense of proximity in an emotional realm. In this sense, Jessica distinguished between sexual practices/acts, and romance which she related to emotional intimacy. Jessica's comments indicate that physical proximity may not always produce a sense of intimacy and that intimacy does not necessarily entail physical proximity.

A closer analysis of Jessica's story suggests that, for her, sexual relations and romantic

love are in constant tension with one another. While Jessica was dating, sleeping with, and texting multiple Korean men, there was one man in particular whom she insisted she had her heart saved for. The person was a Korean whom she met the year before I interviewed her. They volunteered together as lifeguards at a Korean swimming pool so she affectionately called him "the coworker." Jessica frequently showed me pictures of the "coworker" while crooning that he was "so cute!" The coworker was a physical instructor who taught at a gym. He went by his Christian name, Joseph. He was tall and slim. His hair was in a short bob, parted at the center in a fashion that was popular among Korean men at the time that I was conducting field research. "We kissed once last year but we never had sex. This year, I met him once and we kissed again but we did not have sex yet" Jessica said to me during one of the interview sessions.

In Jessica's perspective, Joseph's seeming disinterest in sex made him more of an ideal romantic partner than some other Korean men who seemed to approach her only for sex. Based on my observations, she seemed to revel in the idea that he appeared to be interested in her as more than a sexual partner. For example, when she told me the story of how they have only exchanged a couple of kisses in all the years they have known each other, she had a wide smile on her face and said it in a tone that made it sound as if she was proud of the fact that their "relationship" was based on such sexual restraint. While she had casual one-night-stands and sex with other Korean men whom she did not see as eligible boyfriend-materials, she held back from initiating sexual encounters with Joseph, to whom she had an emotional attachment. In this regard, how did Jessica react when she *did* have sex with Joseph – whom she desired because of his sexual restraint?

Jessica and I shared the same dormitory room in the hostel. The room was a mix-gender dormitory room with four bunk beds crammed into a small room. The room was always dark

because jetlagged tourists were sleeping in their cubicles at all times of the day. The bunk beds were black with flimsy white mattresses. Each cubicle had a small curtain to give a modicum of privacy for individual guests. One day, I woke up in the morning and opened my bed curtain just in time to see Jessica creep into the room. We locked eyes and she mouthed "I will tell you everything later," as she sheepishly grinned, plopped onto her bed and drew the curtains. Later in the day, I sat with her over lunch. We ate Kimbap in the hostel living room.[36]

I observed her texting late into the night the day before: she was trying to meet with Joseph. From my observation, Joseph seemed to have a habit of canceling his date with Jessica at the last minute: he had canceled their afternoon lunch date at the last minute, so Jessica was texting him late into the night trying to set up a new date. Jessica persisted in trying to set up a date but she was upset because she felt as though he did not value her or had feelings for her. I went to bed the night before without observing the outcome of Jessica and Joseph's late-night text conversation. However, when we were conversing over Kimbap, Jessica told me what happened and where she had been until this morning:

> Jessica: He texted very late at night and said that we should meet somewhere halfway so I got up and went over there. He was like, "Since we are seeing each other so late, we will have to sleep together."
>
> MJL: He said that or you said it?
>
> Jessica: He said it over text, so I told him I was on my period so we can't have sex and he was like, "Oh it is ok I just want to see you" and stuff like that.

[36] Kimbap is a popular Korean dish which is portable and cheap. It is rice and various vegetables wrapped in seaweed.

I asked Jessica, “So where did you meet last night? Where were you until this morning?” Jessica responded, “We ended up meeting at a motel… and we had sex. We slept together until this morning. Joseph was so late for work but he was so happy to be with me. We held hands to the subway station and he kissed me goodbye.” Despite her telling him in advance that they could not have sex, they ended up having sex for the first time. According to Jessica, they met at a motel, which made it sound – at least to me – as if Joseph already planned to have sex with Jessica that night regardless of the fact that she told him in advance that she did not want to have sex because of her period. I did not share my doubts with her and remained silent because Jessica looked and sounded elated.

However, after a thoughtful pause, Jessica continued, “I think that means he is really interested in me not just my body…right? He wanted to meet me even though I told him we couldn’t have sex which means he is more interested in me than in sex…right?” Jessica was unable to discard the nagging feeling of doubt she had that he may be only interested in her body. She continued to look at me to agree with her interpretation of his love for her that went beyond sexual desires. She was uncertain about his interest in her but she distinguished between sexual advances with intimate/romantic interests to discern whether a man was in love with her or not. When I asked, “Did you ask him what his feelings were for you?” She responded, “No, I didn’t but I could tell. You don’t really have to say it to know it.” She looked flustered and looked away from me into space. Instead of a direct statement of love, she took his acts of sexual restraint as signs of his intimate feelings for her. Jessica’s feelings and admiration for the “coworker” increased every time they met or texted because he would not pressure her for anything more sexual. From the way she interpreted his intentions, he truly wanted to know her and valued her

company rather than just her body. Although their sexual encounter the night before cast doubt in her mind, she still wanted to believe in his "pure" intentions.

Shortly thereafter, she returned to Denmark with hopes of maintaining intimate ties with him. Through follow-up interviews, I found out that, despite her efforts, she soon lost contact with Joseph because he no longer showed any interest in her after having sex with her. This happened to a lot of my informants: they would return to their home countries with the expectation that they would have long-distance relationships with their new Korean boyfriends, but their hopes would be crushed when the Korean men appeared to quickly lose interest in them now that they were physically unavailable. According to Jessica, Joseph purportedly blamed his bad English skills for his lack of responses to her messages and phone calls. Considering how fluent Jessica was in Korean, his explanations for his lack of responsiveness did not make sense. Deducing from his sudden loss of interest soon after they had sex, I believe Joseph may have only feigned sexual restraint because he somehow knew that it was appealing to Jessica. In other words, rather ironically, he may have performed sexual restraint to have sex with Jessica. She told me that she felt betrayed and she wanted me to assist her in sending him a long text message. Jessica said:

> Some Korean guys are just fuckboys. Take this advice from a girl who has slept with and tried to date many Korean guys. I know this is not a problem just with Korean guys, but I dated two Korean guys for about three months each and both relationships ended because our relationship resulted in nothing but sex.

Jessica looked to Korea as a solution to her dissatisfaction with men back home: Korean men were supposed to be romantic, caring, gentle, and overall different from men back home. Therefore, she was especially scathing towards Korean "fuckboys" – like Joseph – who purportedly prioritized sex over emotional intimacy and thereby provided a challenge to her fantasy that Korean men could serve as antidotes to her "female complaint." She was dejected for a while. However, upon her next visit to Korea a few months after her "breakup" with Joseph, she was soon dating other Korean men. Based on my observation, although Jessica felt disappointed that her fantasies about Korean masculinity were shattered by Joseph, this disappointment did not deter her from desiring Korean men and seeking them as ideal intimate partners.

Many of my informants, much like Jessica, were frustrated with the hookup-focused culture and admired Korean men who were supposedly more willing to take them out on dates without even broaching the subject of sex. Although "hookup" is a concept popularized in the US dating scene, the terms hookups and dates as well as the distinction between the two terms were widely recognized and practiced by my Hallyu tourist informants from different countries. According to Elizabeth McClintock (2010), hookups are "casual, unplanned sexual encounters that occur outside of an established romantic relationship" (47). They differ from dates in that "dates are formally planned and the planned activity is nonsexual (such as dinner), although one or both partners may also be anticipating sexual activity" (47). In other words, hookups are only sexual while dates are erotic in nonsexual ways.

Similar to Jessica, some of my other informants came to Korea with fantasies about Korean men but their fantasies were shattered through their "real life" encounters with Korean men who seemed more interested in sex than romance. They expressed disappointment in

Korean men. For example, one of the Hallyu tourists I worked with had numerous observations about Koreans/Korean men that she wanted to share with me. She spoke most passionately about Korean men's purportedly romantic façade:

> You know what else? Korean guys say I love you to foreign girls to have sex. Their "I love you" don't mean anything. They are basically liars that is why I did not believe my [Korean] boyfriend at first either. They know that saying I love you will get us in bed.

She was saying that Korean men were all competent actors who put on a façade of romanticism to hide their "actual" desires for sex. Based on this argument, sexual desires and romantic desires cannot exist together; one desire is the "true" desire while the other is just fake performance that is used as a means to have sex. The phrase "I love you," the depiction of which motivated my informants to Korea, became words of betrayal. My informants claimed that some Korean men's expression of love only served to mask Korean men's covert sexual desires.

Such feelings of betrayal stemmed from my informants' complaints about male hypersexuality. At the same time, they were also predicated on stereotypes about Asian masculinity. From the perspective of some of my informants, sex and romance were mutually exclusive. Such an essentialist binary fueled equally dichotomous assumptions about Korean masculinity as non-sexual and "Western" masculinity as hypersexual. My informants were not relying on the "realistic" or the nuanced and diverse relationship between Korean masculinities and sexuality; their fantasies and disappointments about Korean masculinity revolved around essentialist stereotypes rooted in perceptions of "Asia" as effeminate and the "West" as

masculine. Ironically, even when the genders representing the so-called West and the East were reversed – "West" being represented by female Hallyu tourists and "East" being represented by Korean men – similar assumptions still appeared in the ways my informants described Korean men.

My intent is not to argue that women only want romance and emotional intimacy and that men only want sex. Rather, I am suggesting that my informants from different parts of the world were using dichotomous understandings of sex-romance in conjunction with equally binary categories of the "East" and the "West" to make sense of their racially-charged erotic fantasies about Korean men. For my informants, the images of Korean men in the dramas made them seem like the ideal romantic partners who would care more about establishing emotional intimacies than sexual ones. In other words, my informants fantasized about Korean men based on their portrayals in the dramas: they were among the few men in the world who appeared to *feel* rather than *manipulate* romantic emotions. However, as I have analyzed in this chapter, my informants' racialized erotic desires and fantasies did not always align with the "real life" experiences they had as tourists in Korea. The transnational intimacies between Korean men and my Hallyu tourist informants were complicated by multiple axes of prejudice, including racism, classism, and sexism.

Conclusion

Several Korean television dramas feature male characters who appear as emotionally sensitive and caring romantics who sacrifice their minds and bodies for the well-being of their lovers. They prioritize emotional connections above sexual ones. After watching the dramas, the viewers I met became Hallyu tourists not only to experience Korean culture but also to meet and

make intimate connections with Korean men. Rather than going to fan meetings to meet the celebrities, my informants went on dates with Korean men they met through dating applications or at bars. Through their racialized erotic desires, my Hallyu tourist informants complicated the pervasive stereotype of Asian men as erotically unappealing to non-Asian women. My focus in this chapter has been on the gendered and racialized desires that facilitated transnational intimacies between Korean men and my Hallyu tourist informants.

The tourists I have interviewed and observed relied on the representations of Korean television dramas as well as racialized stereotypes of Korean men to describe their erotic desires. They wanted men who sought emotional intimacy over physical intimacy. According to my informants, sex was not an accurate indicator of romantic feelings or emotional intimacy. They desired men who were emotionally sensitive, and who were more effeminate than hypermasculine. Even though romance and sexuality are not inherently binary categories, the Hallyu tourists I interviewed did not see it that way: they claimed that sex was entertainment through which they "used" each other's bodies. Hence, they claimed that sex was unrelated to intimacy. They adhered to the dichotomous understanding of sex and romance to decipher the sincerity of the intentions of the Korean men that they met, that is, whether they were only looking to have sex with these women or were "genuinely" interested in them on an emotional level. In this light, the stereotypes of Asian men as weak and effeminate were repositioned as desirable traits by my Hallyu tourist informants who sought those characteristics in their Korean dates and firmly adhered to the perception regardless of "real life" experiences that defied those expectations.

The Hallyu tourists with whom I worked with traveled transnationally in search of the perfect partner and were not afraid to sexually and emotionally extend themselves in a new

environment far away from their homes. At the same time, multiple factors shaped whether their fantasies matched their "real life" experiences or whether "real life" experiences shattered their fantasies. In large part, their experiences in Korea were dependent on their own racial, national, and gendered identities. In other words, my informants harbored racialized erotic fantasies *about* Korean men and were subjected to racialization *by* Korean men. In that sense, both the Korean men as well as my Hallyu tourist informants were subject to the other's racialized erotic desires. In the following chapter (Chapter 6), I will analyze the racialized erotic desires of Korean men and how these men's gender performances were formulated in relation to men of other races as well as through their intimate relations with the Hallyu tourists.

Chapter 6

Korean Men, Racialized Erotic Desires, and Whiteness

"*Nuna* (elder sister), isn't he so good looking? How can these foreign guys look like that with their noses and eyes?"[37] The young Korean man who said this to me had short-cropped hair typical for Korean men serving their mandatory military service. He wore a black baseball cap to hide his short hair. He had a small youthful-looking face with round eyes that reflected his youth. Han was his name and he was in his early twenties. He wore a grey sweatshirt and black pants with sneakers. Apart from his hairstyle, he looked like a typical college student. He was a guest at one of the hostels I was staying in for my field research. He was on a short vacation from his military service and was staying at the hostel to enjoy his freedom before he had to return to the base. I met him for the first time when the hostel arranged a guests' night-out for all the guests staying at the hostel. The group of people who gathered at the hostel lounge to enjoy the night of partying mostly comprised of Hallyu tourists from various countries including Canada, the US, Switzerland, Russia, Singapore, and Turkey. Han and I were the only two Koreans in the group. The Hallyu tourists eyed Han throughout the night; they appeared interested in him. They glanced at him shyly while giggling amongst themselves. We went to a club that was damp and dark with blazing strobe lights. Scantily clad, sweaty men and women of all nationalities and races were dancing to the blaring beat of K-pop songs. While wading through a crowd of jam-packed dancing bodies, Han yelled the above sentence into my ears as he pointed to one of the men in the club.

I was on friendly terms with the man Han pointed out to me; I had become acquainted

[37] The Korean man was not actually related to me by blood. In Korean, *nuna* (elder sister) is an honorific term that younger men use to address older women.

with him at another hostel where I stayed to do my field research. His name was John, and he was a tourist from the US. He had light brown and slightly curly hair, shockingly blue eyes and a big pointy nose. When we first met, John introduced himself to me as a graduate student in Biotechnology from a mid-western state in the US. Han said, "I mean this is so unfair… Life is so unfair. How can we compete with men like that?" He shook his head and walked away to get more drinks from the bar. Ironically, Han himself was attractive enough for the Hallyu tourists in our group to be eyeing him with interest. However, he compared himself to a white man from the US and considered himself physically inferior to him. At that moment, Han was not competing with John for the attention of any specific woman at the bar, nor were they on hostile terms throughout the night when I introduced them to each other. Nonetheless, Han felt as though he was in perpetual competition with a male tourist from the US. Some of the questions I address in this chapter are: How do Korean men formulate their masculinity in relation to transnational dynamics of race, gender, and sex? How do Hallyu and its transnationality influence discourses of masculinity in contemporary Korea?

In the mid-1980s, almost forty years before Han compared himself to John, a similar conversation between a scholar and several Korean men took place and was recorded by Millie Creighton, a Japan scholar. When Creighton interviewed Korean men in the 1980s, they wanted to joke with her, a white female researcher, by putting her in a difficult position: "Can you tell apart the different types of Asians? Can you?" they asked her (Creighton 2009). At a loss for words, Creighton attempted to change the topic. However, the men persisted and even eagerly answered their questions when Creighton did not give them the answer they wanted: "Of course you can tell them apart. The one who looks intelligent—he's the Chinese. The one who looks rich—he's the Japanese. And the one who looks sexy—he's the Korean" (Creighton 2009, 11).

Korean men defined Chinese masculinity as "intelligent," presumably because Chinese scholars like Confucius and Lao-tzu deeply influenced Korean cultural conceptions of gender (particularly masculinity), family, and nationhood. Japan was and still is one of the most prosperous countries in Asia and therefore, Korean men defined Japanese masculinity by their wealth.

In contrast to Japan and China that appeared to be dynamically striving forward, Korea in the 1980s was still mired in the aftermath of the Korean War. It was in turmoil because of the dictatorship and the military government that followed the devastating war. The military government had the ultimate power to imprison and execute citizens suspected of being communist spies.[38] Thus, Korea in the 1980s was not the economically or politically developed nation it has become in the twenty-first century. In that context, Korean men in Creighton's study felt that they could not compete and win against other East Asian men according to financial or economic criteria, so they defined their masculine sense of superiority through their physical "sexiness."

A key difference between my anecdote and that of Creighton's is that while Korean men in the 1980s appeared to be comparing themselves to other East Asian men, Han compared himself to a white US tourist and not to other Asians in the club. The point of comparison for Han went beyond the ethnic and racial boundaries of East Asia. Unlike the Korean men in Creighton's research who were curious about how they stood apart from other East Asian men, that was not a concern for Han. His primary concern was how he would romantically and sexually compete with white Western men for attention of heterosexual (white) women.

[38] Not all of the people executed and punished by the government at the time were communist spies. The government at the time used the notion of espionage to legitimized their torture and killing of Koreans whose political ideologies conflicted with the military government.

As seen in Chapters 4 and 5 of this research, the Hallyu tourists with whom I talked described their desires for Korean men through discourses of racial and cultural difference. These Hallyu tourists desired Korean men because of their "Korean-ness" and what that implied about their romantic and sexual capabilities. Likewise, the Korean men I observed and interviewed seemed to harbor racialized desires for the Hallyu tourists (particularly, white female tourists). The racialized desires of my Hallyu tourist informants and that of my Korean male informants created transnational intimacies between them.

My informants' (both the Hallyu tourists' and Korean men's) racialized desires stem from comparing discourses of "Western" gender norms to those associated with Korea and exaggerating the differences between the "Western" and "Korean" cultures. Their erotic desires derive from transnationally difference-producing encounters; the supposed cultural differences between the "West" and Korea are inflected by "cross-cultural" contacts across time, cultures, and spaces. To extrapolate, Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1992) posit: "As an alternative to this [culturally essentialist] way of thinking about cultural difference, we want to problematize the unity of the 'us' and the otherness of the 'other,' and question the radical separation between the two that makes the opposition possible in the first place" (14). "Us" and the "other" are not inherently or naturally distinctive entities; they were made distinct through a historical set of difference-making relations. According to Gupta and Ferguson, places, nations, and cultures are not neatly bounded within a particular geographic locale. The concepts of nationhood and culture are not always in sync, nor do they exclusively operate within the geographic boundaries of nation-states; in different spaces and temporalities, the concepts of nationhood and culture take disparate forms depending on the unique difference-making relations to which they were exposed. Considering the variable and tenuous connections between the concepts of nations,

cultures, and geographies, (cultural) differences are end-results of difference-making connections, rather than something that immutably demarcate spatial, ideological, or cultural boundaries between "us" and "other."

In particular, in this chapter, I focus on a set of relations between Korean men and Hallyu tourists that produced Korean men's racialized erotic desires for "Western" white women. What do racialized erotics refer to? In her book *The Erotic Life of Racism*, Sharon Holland (2012) puts critical race theory in conversation with queer theory to define racialized erotics. According to Holland, queer theory problematically separates erotic desires from race to theorize erotics as unencumbered and autonomous "choices" made by individuals. On the other hand, Holland contends, critical race theory disregards the erotic as a useful concept for theoretical analysis of race because critical race theory is constantly attempting to create theoretical frameworks *beyond* individualized experiences. Holland critiques critical race theory as often appearing to only focus on their attempts to *go beyond the self*. Holland asks why critical race theory always seems to want to *go beyond* rather than stay anchored in personal matters. By putting queer theory in conversation with critical race theory, Holland anchors racism in erotics. Holland proposes that racism is not just latent in overtly violent and public/systemic encounters between different races of people, something that appears as "personal" as erotic desire is also mired in race and vice versa.

Similarly, Robin Zheng (2016) critiques what she calls "mere preference argument" that defends an individual's racial preferences/aversions regarding their choice of intimate partners. Zheng says that those who espouse the "mere preference argument" claim that their racialized desires are not racist because individual preferences are supposedly detached from racist, sexist, and classist ideologies. Zheng argues that racialized desires – such as "Yellow Fever" – are racist

based on the emotional difficulty and social stigma it creates for the people at the receiving ends of those desires.[39] How are my Korean male informants' erotic desires racialized? How do their racialized erotic desires and interracial relationships reconfigure their masculinity?

In analyzing the intersection of erotics and race, Holland utilizes the concept of "touch." Touching, which can also be interpreted as a form of contact, acts as both a boundary-forming activity and trespassing of those boundaries (Holland 2012). The act of touching/contact, whether symbolic, literal, physical, emotional, violent, or amicable, complicates the concept of "difference"; those who are touching and being touched come to contemplate the fundamental meaning of the difference. In the context of racialized erotic desires, touching/contact comes to dismantle and, at the same time, reaffirm notions of racial differences. While they are intimate, two people of different racial backgrounds may feel "at one" with each other through their corporeal and emotional intimacy but, at the same time, their physical, experiential, and cultural differences are rearticulated through such intimacy.

Intimate relationships between the Hallyu tourists and Korean men with whom I worked serve as examples of the difference-producing sets of relationships that construct discourses of cultural difference between Korea and the "West." Racialized erotic desires stemming from the discourses of cultural differences between Korea and the "West" draw the Hallyu tourists and Korean men into intimate relationships. These transnational intimacies (which can also be seen as a form of touching/contact) make racial and cultural boundaries between Korea and the "West" ever more permeable through the potential of interracial marriage and reproduction but, at the same time, they reaffirm certain essentialist fantasies of cultural and racial differences.

In their analysis of the politics of tourism, scholars have investigated the social dynamics

[39] "Yellow Fever" is a colloquial term that refers to non-Asian people who only exclusively date/erotically desire Asians.

that have led to tourists holding more power than the locals. For instance, the tourist's gaze is often interpreted as being politically charged: it judges as well as denigrates and objectifies certain cultures and people, often based on imperialist stereotypes (Werry 2011). However, countering the tourist gaze, the observant gazes of the locals are also judgmental and politically charged. Darya Maoz (2006) calls it the "mutual gaze." According to Maoz, "The gaze does not belong to the tourists only" (225). Maoz argues that through the mutual gaze, everyone becomes a puppet in the performance of tourism. To extrapolate, Maoz argues that the tourists act accordingly with the politics of the tourist gaze, meaning they seek and demand "authentic" experiences in the toured spaces. Meanwhile, Maoz argues, locals put on a show based on what is expected of them by the tourists. Maoz thus problematizes scholarly theories that claim the tourists are always more powerful than the locals.

Although I agree with Maoz' argument that the gaze is not just one-sided, I disagree with her claim about the mutuality of the gaze which implies that everyone performs a role that is dictated by the gaze of the "other." Her argument is premised on a strictly monetary and performance-centered approach to tourism. What about tourist experiences that occur "off stage" and beyond the monetary aspects? I argue that rather than becoming puppets through tourism, tourists and locals each adhere to their own fantasies about the "other" and act upon those fantasies. This is especially the case in Hallyu tourism compared to some other researched cases of romance tourism. Often in romance tourism, local men in the romance tourism industry are gigolos. These gigolos are deemed to fashion themselves after the tourists' fantasies, form intimate relationships with them, and then ask for expensive gifts and allowances from these women. For instance, some of the scholarship on romance tourism in Jamaica suggests that, because Rastafarian Jamaican men are more popular among romance tourists, some Jamaican

men pretend to be Rastafarian to give themselves a better chance of being chosen by wealthy romance tourists (Pruitt and LaFont 1995).

However, as I learned through my field research, Korean men who desired Hallyu tourists were not in these relationships for money, which changed the dynamic of the "mutual gaze." Korean men who were in intimate relations with my white Hallyu tourist informants did not ask for money or gifts from the Hallyu tourists. Rather, based on my observation, Korean men seemed to spend more money than Hallyu tourists when they went on dates. In that regard, contrary to what Maoz claims, neither the Korean men nor the Hallyu tourists were puppets whose performances are solely based on the other's expectations. While my Hallyu tourist informants "gazed" at Korean men, expecting them to be romantic and sexually reserved, my Korean male informants "gazed" back at the tourists and fantasized about them as sexually promiscuous women. The transnationally intimate encounters between Hallyu tourists and Korean men became a "showdown" between different racialized erotic desires and expectations. In that sense, I suggest that Hallyu tourism was not a lopsided power hierarchy dictated purely by the tourists' fantasies; instead, it became a site of intimacy fraught with conflicts of interest.

In this chapter, I analyze my ethnographic research with Korean men. The majority of them were college students in their early twenties whom I recruited as research participants after observing their close interactions with my Hallyu tourist informants. Some Korean men were in their late twenties or early thirties who worked at the hostels frequented by the Hallyu tourists. I also interviewed foreign male tourists whose travels to Korea were not inspired by Hallyu. They were backpackers from countries like France, England, the US, New Zealand, and the Netherlands who were on their tour of Asia. These tourists were also in their twenties, and I deduced from the long duration of their travel – lasting from a month to six months – that they

were middle/upper-middle class with enough time and money to spend on traveling through Asia.[40] Both the Korean men and these foreign male tourists gave me insights into their perspective on Hallyu and Korean masculinity that diverged from that of my Hallyu tourist informants.

The concept of Korean masculinity stirred strong emotions and opinions among both my Korean male informants and my foreign male tourist informants. I found that most of these strong opinions revolved around questions of racialized sexuality and racial desires. Furthermore, Korean men I interviewed seemed to operate through their stereotypes of "Western" female sexuality. Korean men I interviewed and observed largely perceived *seoyang* (Western) women in Korea as either prostitutes or sexually liberal women who would indiscriminately provide passionate sexual experiences. My Korean male informants' descriptions of their racialized erotic desires for "Western" women revealed the potential disparities between mediated depictions of "soft" masculinity and how Korean men embodied masculinity in "real life."

In this chapter, I analyze the racialized erotic desires of Korean men. I contest the binary and essentialist notion of preexisting differences between the East-West, men-women, romance-sex. I argue that, in the Hallyu context, such discourses of difference are created through transnational, trans-cultural, and trans-racial encounters between the Hallyu tourists and Korean men that are rooted in longer histories of Korea's intimate and erotic intertwinement with the foreign – particularly "Western" – powers.

[40] These tourists were thrifty and resourceful in their travels; they would work part-time at hostels to fund their travel, stay at hostels rather than hotels, and take the cheapest transportation available (i.e. boats and buses rather than airplanes). However, the fact that they could afford to spend several months traveling, as opposed to holding a steady job, indicates that they were not in financial situations where they had to support their families or worry about long-term financial plans.

As Gupta and Ferguson point out, spaces, nations, and cultures are not the same. However, Korean nationalism and its concept of nationhood hinge on the claimed discursive uniformity of Korean national space, culture, and race. More specifically, Korean nationalism's key component lies in its adherence to mono-ethnic conceptions of Korean-ness. According to such logic, Korea has always been inhabited by people who held the same national, cultural, and racial identities. Based on such logic, only those whose families have historically/genealogically been "pure-blood" Koreans can be deemed "real" Koreans (Kang 2018). Historically, such mono-ethnic nationalism led to the misogynistic marginalization of Korean women who were "tainted" by their interactions with non-ethnic Korean men.

In Korean history, interracial and intercultural relationships between Koreans and non-Koreans, in particular those involving Korean women and non-Korean men, were heavily stigmatized because of dominant discourses of Korean nationalism. For example, during Japanese colonization, hundreds of Korean women were forcibly sent to the war-front as sex slaves for Japanese soldiers; after the Korean War, Korean female camp town prostitutes had intimate relations with US soldiers stationed in Korea. The Korean women in these interracial and interethnic relationships – forced or otherwise – were stigmatized to the point that many of them committed suicide, were murdered (by their kin, in a form of honor killing), or lived a life of shame (Min 2003, Cho 2006). The Korean patriarchal system categorized these women as "dirty" women who were no longer suitable for a "normal" life of marriage and motherhood. In that sense, the ethnocentric nationalism of Korea did not allow the re-assimilation of women who were deemed "tainted" by their encounters with foreign men (Shin 2006). The same structure of marginalization also applied to interracial children born from the relationships between Korean women and non-Korean men. At one point in Korean history, the Korean government went as far

as to categorize interracial Korean children as "illegitimate" and "deformed" (Lee 2008). In this manner, discourses of patriarchy within Korea – which derives their power through their entwinement with Korean monoethnic nationalism – systematically stigmatized interracial relationships between Korean women and non-Korean men.

In the twenty-first century, a change of events occurred in Korea whereby interracial relationships involving Korean men increased in number. In the past, Korean men who did not conform to the hegemonic Korean masculine accomplishments – upper-class, college-educated, living in urban environments – used to live alone. In the 21st Century, they are choosing to marry mail-order brides from Eastern Europe or Southeast Asia rather than remain bachelors (Kim 2014a). Furthermore, many male Hallyu stars' music videos incorporate scenes where foreign (especially white) women are depicted as erotically desiring the male Hallyu stars. Such portrayals assert the global popularity of Korean masculinity and Korean men's purported dominance over men of other races (Jung 2010a). These two types of interracial relations are at the opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of the discourse of masculine privilege: the former is a case in which Korean men who are unable to marry Korean women acknowledge their "defeat" and seek foreign wives, while the latter is symbolic of the discourse of Korean male desirability and superiority above men of other races. How did my Korean male informants interpret Hallyu tourists' desires? How did they interact with the Hallyu tourists?

Some Hallyu fans characterize Korean masculinity as androgynous (Oh 2015a), gentle (Creighton 2009), and safe (Elfving-Hwang 2011). These notions are premised on Korean men's purported nonsexuality or their ability to restrain their sexual urges. The discourse of Korean masculinity popularized through Hallyu is based on a particular depiction of Korean masculinity in fictional Korean television dramas. These masculine depictions are categorized as either soft

masculinity or kkonminam (flower boy) masculinity. Although my Hallyu tourist informants predominantly described Korean men through the discourse of soft masculinity, in reality, I found that very few of my Korean male informants readily espoused the so-called soft masculinity.

The image of soft masculinity arose as a counterpoint to a long trajectory of Korean masculinities based on Confucian and militaristic masculinities. Confucian ideologies legitimized men's superiority over women: a popular Confucianism-derived Korean phrase, "men are skies and women are the earth" demands that women look up to and revere men. Although misogynistic discourses are not as overt in Korean culture nowadays, they still persist covertly as indicated by the increasing popularity of anti-feminist sentiments and backlash against the #MeToo movement in Korea. In modern Korean history, military dictatorships and mandatory military service created militaristic masculinity in which the military became an essential part of the discourse surrounding Korean masculinity (Moon 2005a). The discourse of soft masculinity, rather than completely usurping these older masculine models, is intermixing the old with the new to create complex fields of gendered possibilities for Korean men. The question arises, considering that discourses of soft masculinity and kkonminam masculinity were largely pop culture-induced masculine ideals, do they exist outside of the pop culture contexts? More specifically, do they impact the everyday gendered and erotic practices of Korean men? Or are they purely fictional and fantastical gender performances that only exist in the world of dramas and the Hallyu fans' imaginations?

Navigating Cultural Differences through "I Love You"

Saranghae (I love you) is a phrase that the heroes in Korean dramas state at the climax of

the dramas. For example, Kim Shin, the hero of *Guardian, The Lonely and Great God* tells the heroine that he loves her just before he sacrifices himself for her sake. The phrase is used within the drama as a gesture to emphasize the depth of the hero's love for the heroine. Even though Kim's love is already made evident through his acts of sacrifice, the phrase becomes a punchline that verbally drives the message home. Similarly, in the television drama *Descendants of the Sun* and *My Love from the Star*, the protagonists verbally profess their love near the finale of the dramas. In these dramas, the heroes' declaration of *sarang* (love) for the heroines comes after all the episodes that emotionally build up to the moment. Due to the significance of the phrase *saranghae* in Korean dramas, the most popular debate among the Hallyu tourists I interviewed pertained to the meaning of the phrase *saranghae*.

At times, the phrase "I love you" served as a form of mutual understanding between the Hallyu tourists and Korean men who had almost nothing in common, including language. For example, some of my Korean male informants said that *saranghae* or "I love you" was the only way they could get their erotic intentions across to Hallyu tourists who have varying degrees of Korean fluency. Three Korean men and I sat down at a guesthouse lounge on a long conference table that also served as a dinner table. They were each in complicated romantic situations: Yoon had a crush on a Japanese tourist; Park was in a relationship with a German tourist; Sean was in an on-and-off relationship with a Korean woman but had sex with foreign tourists.

> Park: The thing about dating foreign girls is that you cannot predict anything.
>
> MJL: What do you mean?
>
> Park: I mean when I am dating Korean girls, I know their pattern. I know why they behave a certain way. I can see whether they are pissed or happy or

> turned on based on how they act. But when you are interested in or dating a foreigner, that's not the case.
>
> Yoon: I agree 100% I cannot tell what that Japanese girl is thinking…What she thinks of me…I would have known by now if she were Korean.
>
> Sean: Don't be so definitive about that. Look at my ex-girlfriend. She is Korean and I can't tell what that bitch is feeling or thinking most of the time.
>
> Yoon: I mean… I guess… But it is easier with Korean girls though! You can fight it out in Korean and stuff but with foreign girls we can only say I love you and go from there. That is like the one phrase that all girls want to hear right? It is what they expect us to say. But anything more complicated than that is just impossible with the language barrier and everything.

Here, the phrase "I love you" was used to mediate the potential miscommunications and misunderstandings that may arise from cultural and linguistic differences. "I love you," whether spoken in Korean or English, became the sole phrase that both my Korean male informants and their Hallyu tourist partners could comprehend when the Hallyu tourists were unable to comprehend Korean, or when the Korean men had limited English skills. However, many of my Hallyu tourist informants were able to communicate in Korean at an intermediate level due to their consumption of Korean television dramas and K-pop. Hence, as I will analyze in this chapter, the phrase "I love you" functions as much more than just a cultural bridge between two people who desire each other but are hindered by language barriers.

The transnational intimacies between my Korean male and Hallyu tourist informants were forged despite their different cultural understandings of love. This is not to say that only

two cultural conceptions of love – that of Korea and the Hallyu tourist's "native" culture – are in operation in these intimate encounters: even the supposed "Korean" cultural notion of love, as well as that of the Hallyu tourist's cultures, are created through intersections of various culturally, historically, and situationally affected notions of love. For instance, certain ideals of love are universalized through transnational media and influence the ideas and practices of love in other cultures. Hollywood romantic comedies, Bollywood films, and Mexican telenovelas screened and consumed all over the world are a few examples of transnational media that disseminate culturally-inflected ideologies of love to their transnational viewers. These media are then interpreted by their transnational viewers in disparate ways.

I would argue that Korean dramas are another example of transnational media that transnationally disseminate certain ideologies of love, which are then interpreted and drawn upon by Hallyu fans in multiple ways. The Hallyu dramas depict heterosexual romantic love occurring between "soft" masculine men willing to do anything for love, and women who do not have to do anything extraordinary to become the recipients of such unconditional love. Such depictions of love created intimate contact zones between my Korean men and Hallyu tourist informants. In the following section, I will analyze why my Korean male informants felt compelled to draw upon Korean television dramas' portrayal of Korean masculinity (for example, romantic and "soft") to woo the white Hallyu tourists.

Combatting Stereotypes of Asian Masculinity through Romantic Gestures

A Korean man named Jung had his own interpretation of why he and his fellow Korean men say "I love you" to the Hallyu tourists. He did not think that Korean men used "I love you" simply to overcome the language barrier with Hallyu tourists. His interpretation of transnational

intimacies between the Hallyu tourists and Korean men was heavily influenced by the discourses of racialized erotic desires. At the time that I met Jung, he was a 28-year-old Korean man who spoke enough English to communicate with the Hallyu tourists but not enough to engage in a lengthy conversation with them. He was tall and lanky. I met him at one of my Hallyu tourist informants' birthday party. He was invited to the party by the Hallyu tourist because she thought he was handsome (an opinion that she kept whispering to me throughout the party).

While all the Hallyu tourists were getting drinks at the bar, I stood beside Jung outside at the patio because neither of us was fond of drinking. Our interview took place in Korean as we stood on the patio looking into the crowded bar through a large window that connected the patio to the bar. Jung said to me, "Look inside. It is all foreigners and then some Korean girls who are obsessed with sleeping with foreigners." I looked inside and indeed the bar was filled with foreigners and a small group of fashionably dressed Korean women. There were some Korean men but they seemed to keep to themselves. After a moment of silence, Jung turned his face towards me and stared straight into my eyes. He remarked, "Korean guys have it hard because they are so unpopular especially in places like these. You, as an Asian girl, can go into the club right now and attract any foreign guy you want. Any foreign guy in the room would go for you if you approach them." He tilted his head to stare off into space and said to me,

> But for example, if I go in there and try to get foreign girls, there is maybe one in ten chances that I will get some. Asian girls, you can even go to clubs in foreign countries too and they will love you because you are seen as exotic and all but I bet I will be so unpopular in the clubs in the US or Europe. I bet some of them would not even let me in because I am an Asian man.

He looked down at his feet for a while before reverting his gaze back to the bar. Jung believed that by virtue of being Asian, he, along with many other Korean men were unpopular among US and European (i.e. "Western") women.

From Jung's perspective, there was a distinct difference between Korean women's experiences with racialized erotics and those of Korean men. According to Jung, Korean, and Asian, women were globally desirable because they are perceived as "exotic" beauties. Indeed, statistically, Asian women are said to be more likely to enter into interracial relationships than do Asian men (McClintock 2010). This is not just because of Asian women's preference or proclivity for interracial relationships; rather, it is due to the Orientalist feminization of Asia which renders Asian women as desirable and hyper-feminine figures while portraying Asian men as effeminate and emasculated subjects. The supposed-femininity of Asian men makes them unpopular in both the heterosexual and the queer dating scene in the West: many online dating profiles in the US boldly state "no Asians" (Nguyen 2014). Jung was feeling bitter and despondent due to the racialized desires that supposedly marginalized Korean men in the "Western" dating scene.

Despite the transnational popularity of Hallyu and the subsequently rising status of Korean soft masculinity in the global (including the "Western") dating scene, Jung seemed to be experiencing some form of cognitive dissonance in which he could not process his newly acquired popularity as a Korean man among the Hallyu tourists, including those from the "West." Jung's observation of his unpopularity was especially ironic because he was specifically invited to a Hallyu tourist's birthday party due to her desire for him. Hence, I asked Jung, "Is that really true? I feel like you guys may be more popular than you think, what with Korean dramas

and K-pop, don't you think so?" Jung replied, "Maybe a little, I don't know. But all I know is that we are still not as popular as that guy," he pointed to a white man jovially chatting at the bar with a glass of beer in his hands. "Or that guy," he pointed to a Black man perched on a stool. I asked, "Why do you think so?" He answered, "I don't think so, I know so. That's just the way it is. You wouldn't understand [because] you are an Asian girl. So to come back to your question about why we use the phrase 'I love you' so much: that is my long-winded answer."

He smiled sheepishly and looked around the patio at all the people standing around us. According to Jung, Korean men used the phrase "I love you" and performed romantic masculinity because that was the one quality through which they could "compete" against men of other races. Jung seemed to be implying that Korean men performed romantic and "soft" masculinity just so they could be competitive in the dating scene involving "Western" white women. Based on this explanation, Korean men's utterance of "I love you" was more of a tactic to combat stereotypes of Asian masculinity than an emotive phrase conveying one's amorousness.

Jung's perspective on his global unpopularity contrasted with what I was observing in the hostels daily as I interacted with Hallyu tourists. Some Hallyu tourists with whom I worked even preferred Korean men as intimate partners above men of other races, ethnicities, and nationalities. Some of them specifically came to Korea because they were attracted to Korean men. In extreme cases, some dreamed of marrying a Korean man and living in Korea. I witnessed a few instances of Hallyu tourists leaving the hostel to go and live with a Korean man in his apartment. From the hostel workers, I even heard of one case of a Hallyu tourist from Russia who managed to get pregnant during her trip to Korea and married the Korean man with whom she had intimate relations. According to the hostel workers who told me her story, starting

on the first day of her stay in Korea, the Russian tourist said she wanted to marry a Korean man. Thus, her story of pregnancy and marriage was narrated by others as a story of "fulfilling her dreams" rather than a one-night-stand gone wrong. These accounts show how far some Hallyu tourists would go to find their ideal Korean lovers. Jung, however, thought differently; he felt that the racialized stereotypes rooted in Orientalism made him sexually unappealing and unpopular to "Western" white women. In Hollywood, Asian men are rarely portrayed sexually and are imputed with no sexual drive whether they are characterized as wimps, martial arts contenders, foreigners, or silent victims (Chua and Fujino 1999, Jung 2010a).

Celine Parrenas Shimizu (2012) complicates scholarly critiques of Hollywood by presenting us with a counter-reading. Parrenas Shimizu argues that, rather than seeing Asian American men's desexualization in Hollywood as a negative phenomenon, we should interpret it as offering a way to re-envision masculinity outside the phallic power of domination and subjugation. In other words, Parrenas Shimizu argues that Asian American male depictions in Hollywood movies show that there are *other ways* of being masculine through intimacy, emotionality, and vulnerability: she calls it "ethical masculinity." Although Parrenas Shimizu's reinterpretation of these Hollywood movies provides a novel feminist theoretical framework, the radical potential of reinterpreting Hollywood/Western media seems to have eluded Korean men like Jung. Rather, due to the stereotypes perpetuated through "Western" media, as well as personal experiences of rejection in the interracial and transnational dating scene, Jung seemed to have developed a feeling of despondency and powerlessness in relation to men of other races. Hence, he interpreted Korean men's utterance of "I love you" to the Hallyu tourists as their means to combat their supposed unpopularity; by professing their love to the Hallyu tourists, Jung claimed that he and his fellow Korean men were attempting to make themselves appealing

to the "Western" white women who would otherwise never give them a chance as romantic partners due to pervasive racist stereotypes regarding Asian masculinity.

The Racialized Desires in Korean Men's "I Love You"

Due to the racially charged desires that generate transnational intimacies between the Hallyu tourists and Korean men, according to Jung, "I love you" is not just an emotive phrase but a tactical one. Furthermore, Jung noted,

> Korean guys probably say I love you and approach *seo-yang yeojadeul* (literal translation: Western women) more easily than Korean women because there are no consequences. I mean the foreign women stay in Korea for maybe a few weeks at most. If Korean guys say I love you to them and don't mean it, they can pretend and have fun for few weeks without any long-term duties attached to it. If they approach Korean girls, they have to think about the people they may know in common, their reputation, and other long-term relationship issues, even marriage maybe.

According to Jung, in some cases, Korean men say "I love you" to the "Western" Hallyu tourists, not when they emotionally mean it, but when they want to enjoy casual sex with Hallyu tourists. The use of this phrase also highlights the dominant stereotypes about "Western" (particularly white) women as sexually available. The logic goes, that "Western" women are so sexually "easy" that with just one statement of love they would become sexually available.

Many of the white tourists whom I worked with told me about being mistaken by Korean

men for sex workers. These stories also illustrate how some Korean men view "Western" women as sexually promiscuous. This perception particularly impacts the experiences of white Hallyu tourists. For instance, several white female tourists informed me that in clubs Korean men often asked them if they were "Russian." As I discussed in Chapter 5, since prostitution is illegal in Korea, "Russian" here is a code word for "prostitute" due to the large number of Russian and Eastern European women working in the Korean sex industry. By virtue of their racialized bodies in Korea, white Hallyu tourists were not only deemed sexually available but literally conflated with foreign sex workers.

This example underscores how the Hallyu tourists are not the only ones with racialized desires: Korean men also have racialized desires for the white Hallyu tourists. I specifically say "white" Hallyu tourists for two reasons: one, based on my field research, only the white Hallyu tourists were conflated with sex workers and, second, from my observation, very few Korean men expressed erotic desires for the Hallyu tourists who were women of color. Hence, my Korean male informants' desires indicate that some Korean men's racialized erotic fantasies specifically pertain to white women. Furthermore, assuming that market demands influence market supply, the huge "supply" of white sex workers in Korea also indicates Korean men's erotic fantasies for white women.

Hallyu tourists who are women of color have very different racialized erotic experiences in Korea. In Chapter 5, I analyzed my interviews with two Black Hallyu tourists from the US named Beth and Bella. They were identical twins who had the same hairstyle (medium-length natural hair) and wore the same style of glasses (horn-rimmed square glasses). Although they had their fair share of dates with Korean men, I observed that they were not as sought-after as my white informants. One day, the twins, a white Hallyu tourist from Denmark, and I were

walking along a street in *Shinchon* (a part of Seoul that is densely populated with universities) when the twins stopped on the street at gazed at something. I turned back and asked them what they were looking at. Craning her neck, Beth replied, "Didn't you see the Blasian (Black + Asian interracial) baby in the stroller? The mother was Black so the father must be Korean." I asked, "Why are you looking so hard at the baby? Was it really cute or something?" Bella slowly started walking again and replied, "Well, the baby was cute but it is more so because me and my sister always look for hope." I asked, "What do you mean hope?" They replied almost in unison, "Hope that there will be Korean men willing to marry us!" They did not exclusively desire or date Korean men; based on their recollections, a majority of Beth's ex-boyfriends were white, while Bella chose to not comment on her dating history but did mention that not all of her ex-boyfriends were Asian. Beth and Bella also said that Korean men seemed to be uninterested in women with darker shades of skin than Korean women. In other words, according to Beth and Bella, Korean appeared to only be interested in engaging in interracially intimate relationships with white Hallyu tourists.

Kumiko Nemoto (2008) has argued that Asian American men negotiate their position in the US hegemonic masculine hierarchy through their intimate relationships to white women: "Asian American men's relationships with white women serve as a vehicle for either the men's challenge of or ascension within the internal dimension of hegemonic masculinity" (93). Based on Beth and Bella's accounts, it appears as though it is not just Asian American men whose masculinities are shaped by their intimate relationships with white women. Korean masculinities appear to also be shaped by Korean men's intimate relations with white Hallyu tourists.

In the context of such racialized erotic desires, some Korean men I observed seemed to utilize *saranghae* or "I love you" to ingratiate themselves with white Hallyu tourists because the

phrase is highlighted in Korean dramas as something that the heroines are always pleased to hear from the mouths of the heroes. For example, Michael, a young hostel owner, was talking to one of his friends who came by the hostel to party with the tourists. We were all seated in a circle in the lounge area. Since the space was small, everyone was seated very close to each other. There were three Korean men in the group, two of whom were the hostel owners' friends. There were also Hallyu tourists from various countries including Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, the US, Canada, and Hong Kong. The women far outnumbered the men at this party. Despite the rainy weather, everyone was dressed ready for a night of bar hopping and clubbing. In the middle of the circle was a small table brimming with bottles of alcohol and light snacks. While not that many guests were eating the snacks consisting of peanuts, saltine crackers, and chips, the alcohol was disappearing very rapidly. Michael sat next to me, while his two friends sat on the other side of him. Speaking in Korean, Michael told one of his friends, "Pick one you like and say 'I love you.'" When I heard this, I turned towards them to observe their conversation.

One of Michael's friends, a Korean man with a long and narrow face, big nose, and tanned skin, was staring at a woman who was seated directly across from him in the circle of people. She was a Hallyu tourist from Switzerland who had platinum blond hair and very pale skin. She was wearing a plaid mini skirt that barely covered her bottom and a cut-off top with platform shoes and knee-high socks. She had her hair up in pigtails. Noticing that he was eyeing the woman, the hostel owner told his friend to say "I love you" to flatter her. When he noticed me observing them, Michael turned to me and said in Korean,

> You know, this guy always gets the best looking girls. At one of the guesthouse parties we went to a while ago, he scored with two of the hottest French girls that

> I have ever seen in my life. And I'm being serious! They were the most beautiful women I have seen in my entire life. I think it is his looks. He looks so cheesy that when he says *saranghae* he sounds really serious. Girls fall for that stuff.

Michael's friend finally approached the Swiss tourist by moving to a seat closer to her. Throughout the night I observed him showering her with compliments and "I love you," said both in English and in Korean. At the end of the party when everyone else got up to go bar hopping, they disappeared together, presumably to spend the night together.

In this case, Michael and his friends said "I love you" to capture women's interests. The phrase was actively incorporated into their efforts to pursue white Hallyu tourists. Michael did not state whether "two of the hottest French girls" that his friend had sex with were white. However, earlier in the night, during a casual conversation, both Michael and his friend listed white Hollywood stars like Scarlett Johansson and Chloe Moretz as their ideal women, so I deduced from this conversation and Michael's friend's attraction to the white Swiss woman, that the two French women were most likely also white. In this regard, Michael and his friend's erotic desires were very much racialized; they did not use the phrase "I love you" to pursue any Hallyu tourist, they specifically used it to appeal to the white Hallyu tourists. Even though some of my Korean male informants used the phrase "I love you" as a "tactic" to make themselves appealing to white women, it is important to acknowledge that such examples do not indicate that all Korean men were being deceptive per se when they were saying "I love you" to my Hallyu tourist informants.

Romance and sex are intertwined with the politics of race and modernity; for a long time, those with Eurocentric conceptions of romance held onto the belief that only the modernized

"Western" cultures and its inhabitants knew romantic love (Jankowiak 1997). Of course, romantic love has existed in non-European cultures in their own unique forms. Just because particular performances and discourses of love do not always coincide with a "Western" understanding of love does not mean that its status as love should be denied. Some Korean men's expression of "I love you" may at times be interpreted as a phrase that they use for sexual gains, but it could very well be their own interpretation of what love means.

I had a chance to interview my longtime Korean male friend Jake. His tanned skin and big round eyes and overall good looks made him very popular among his female peers when he was in school. After hearing about my research, he told me about his experience with dating a Japanese woman who came to Korea as an exchange student because she was inspired by Korean pop culture. Jake said, "From the Korean perspective, we say 'I love you' (*saranghae*) when we reach this much feeling for another person." Jake held his left hand up to his chin. "But in some cultures, like my ex-girlfriend's culture, people say 'I love you' and the sentence has much more serious and deeper meaning than it does in Korea. They say love when they have this much feeling," he said as he lifted his right hand over his head. He emphasized the gap between his two hands by vigorously waving them up and down in front of my eyes. According to his interpretation, it is not that Korean men do not "love" foreign women, it is that the use of the word love (*sarang*) in Korea is different from how it is used in some other cultures. According to Jake, the phrase "I love you," and the concept of love is used more "lightly" in Korea than in some other cultural contexts. Jake's argument somewhat contradicts examples in Korean television dramas where the phrase has gravity. This contradiction points to how the mediated depictions of love in Korean television dramas do not necessarily portray "real life" practices of romance in Korea; such idealistic qualities of the dramas' depictions of romance and masculinity

allow them to facilitate the re-imagination of romantic and masculine norms not just in the Hallyu fans' cultures but within Korea as well.

As I have shown in this section, despite the transnational popularity of Hallyu and Korean male celebrities, the Korean men I interviewed believed that they were unpopular in the transnational dating scene. They saw themselves as not tall, strong, or sexual enough compared to white or Black men. At the same time, they felt they had to compete with these men to become intimate with foreign (white) women. In such cases, some resulted in using the phrase "I love you" to level the playing field between foreign men and themselves. My Korean male informants portrayed themselves as romantics through the frequent use of the word "love." In this regard, discourses of Korean masculinity are formed in "competition" with that of other racialized masculinities. Furthermore, some Korean men's racialized desires for white women inspired them to frequently use the phrase "I love you." This begs the question: Are some Korean men's performance of soft and romantic masculinity merely gender performances that they utilize to have sex with white Hallyu tourists? Or do they represent forms of alternative masculinity that contest Korean as well as "Western" hegemonic masculinity?

Faking Soft Masculinity for Sex?

Research on female sex tourism to the Caribbean describes local men's complaints regarding their feelings of being used by the European female sex tourists (Pruitt and LaFont 1995). On the other hand, in the case of Hallyu tourism, women tourists often state that they feel used by Korean men. The stereotype of white women as sexually promiscuous "easy lays" make some Korean men prefer the intimate company of Hallyu tourists over relationships with Korean women. When some of my Hallyu tourist informants discovered Korean men's "ulterior

motives," they felt used. Do Korean men necessarily have "ulterior motives" hidden behind their use of the phrase *saranghae*?

I interviewed male tourists from France who seemed to believe that Korean men were manipulating and misguiding gullible Hallyu tourists. One evening during the Summer of 2017, the lounge area of the guesthouse was abuzz with excitement as several women were going in and out of the lounge on dates with Korean men. One woman was busy preparing herself to go on a movie date with a man she met on Tinder. She was in the lounge with a big hand mirror and her bag of makeup. She was meticulously applying makeup to her face. In the meantime, another Hallyu tourist walked into the lounge disgruntled by a dissatisfactory date. Many more women were sitting around immersed in their phones and swiping left and right on pictures of Korean men on Tinder. The bright lights of their cell phones lit their mesmerized faces. They occasionally looked up from their phones to exchange comments about their success or progress in securing a hot date for the night. Observing the buzz of motions and emotions, a male tourist sitting next to me nudged my arm. He was a short French tourist with deep-set brown eyes, dark stubbly beard and curly hair poking out from under a blue baseball cap that he had on backward. He was wearing dark black shorts that came to his knees and a colorful and flowery Hawaiian-style shirt. He was casually sipping on a can of Korean beer. "I'm Fred, what is your name?" He asked me. When I responded, we went about asking each other the typical introductory questions that everyone at the guesthouse asked each other: name, nationality, how long they are staying in Korea, and their next destinations. Fred told me he lived in France and came to Korea for three weeks (he planned on staying just one week in Korea but liked the country so much that he extended his stay). He said he planned to go to Japan and then to Southeast Asia when he grew tired of Korea.

After learning about my research, Fred was eager to share his observations of Hallyu tourism. He was very opinionated. In a loud and sharp voice, Fred argued that Korean men desired foreign women because they wanted the bragging rights for having slept with diverse women:

> Korean men in dramas or K-pop are so dandy and harmless looking. But in reality, they are not like that. When I first came to Korea, some Korean guys… who I guess did language exchange in the US and thought they were hipsters now were like "Yo man, hey whatz up" and all that fucking shit. They were all acting fake American cool you know what I mean right? You are from America you can understand. They say "Oh let's go to club with us. You know foreign girls we can fuck?" They just want to fuck foreign girls to check it off of their list.

Fred made a checkmark in the middle of the air with his fingers. "Korean guys want to brag about fucking foreign girls. They literally go," Fred poked me with his elbow and while imitating the Korean guys' accented English, said, "Oh you fuck Korean girls eh? You introduce me to some foreign girls." Looking at my confused face, Fred elaborated, "I mean they think that because I am a foreign guy in Korea who likes to party, that I must have had sex with many Korean girls. They are saying um… They are saying it is their turn to have some fun. It's like, I had my go with the Korean chicks, they want their shot with foreign women to make it fair or whatever." Fred was speaking very fast as if all these thoughts were in his mind the whole time and he finally had a willing listener in me. "They refer to women like a piece of meat you can fuck just to complete your checklist. I would never treat women the way Korean guys do because

French men would never treat women like that. Never!" Fred was emphatic in his disgust. He took a swig from his can of beer and continued, "And because Korean guys look so cute and clean, the foreign girls let their guard down. Going on dates with guys can be dangerous, especially in another country, but look at all these women going on dates with Korean guys they barely know."

Fred thought the Hallyu tourists had no reservations about going on dates with Korean men because they felt safe with Korean men due to their androgynous appearance and the discourses surrounding their romantic attitudes. However, from Fred's perspective, this sense of safety was misguided because men cannot be androgynous and "soft" while desiring women; to Fred, male androgyny or effeminacy was equivalent to queerness. He thus displayed an ignorance of the diverse forms of masculinity that exist cross-culturally. In Korea, effeminate male behavior is not necessarily associated with queerness (Elfving-Hwang 2011). Furthermore, whether the soft masculine performances of Korean men are indeed "fake" is debatable depending on how and to what extent one defines gender performances as "real" or "fake."

Fred shook his head while staring at the Hallyu tourists who were busy getting ready for their evening dates with Korean men. He seemed less worried about the actual dangers that may befall women and angrier that some Korean men seemed to be deceiving women with their "innocent" appearances. According to Fred, Hallyu tourists did not know why they were being desired by Korean men; they were being desired because they were part of a "checklist" and "pieces of meat." The way Fred analyzed the situation, Korean men were only seeking Hallyu tourists for sex and, furthermore, there was even a sense of getting even with the foreign men for having sex with Korean women.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, interracial relationships in Korean history

that gained the most press coverage in national media involved Korean women and foreign men (e.g. Japanese soldiers during World War II, US soldiers stationed in Korea after the Korean War). Korean nationalist rhetoric frames these encounters as the subjugation of Korean women by foreign men and, more broadly, as symbolic of the subjugation of Korea by foreign powers (Kim 2014a). These popular discourses intertwine Korean nationhood with Korean masculinity: according to these discourses, in the past, both the Korean men and the nation were too powerless to prevent foreign men from having sex with Korean women. Based on Fred's logic, by having sex with Hallyu tourists, Korean men were not only satisfying their own racialized erotic fantasies but were also affirming Korea's masculine and national power on the transnational stage. In this context, Korean men were no longer hapless bystanders who have to watch Korean women being intimate with foreign men; they were the ones who were sexually "dominating" men of other races through intimate relations with the white Hallyu tourists.

Korean masculinity is shaped through – for lack of a better word – "competition" with men of other races; these "competitions" may be imagined, psychological, or physical. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, male K-Pop stars often feature white women in their music videos (Jung 2010a). These white women are shown to choose Korean men and fawn over them while ignoring men of other races. By highlighting white women's desires for Korean men, these K-Pop stars assert their masculinity as more desirable than that of other ethnicities. In a similar vein, some Korean men that I observed used the Hallyu tourists' desires to affirm their masculinity. Sleeping with or even getting "chosen" by non-Korean – particularly white women – was deemed proof of one's masculine appeal for some Korean men. In other words, their reasons for performing romantic and soft masculinity may not be as "pure" and simplistic as the Hallyu tourists are led to believe via Korean television dramas. In other words, they may not be

performing soft masculinity simply because it is "in their nature"; some of them do so in order to bed women from different parts of the world. Hence, as I noted in Chapter 5, it leaves some Hallyu tourists feeling used by men for whom they had intimate feelings.

Many foreign male tourists – like Fred – who were uninvolved in the Hallyu scene were disgruntled that Hallyu tourists desired and felt safe around Korean men. Another male tourist seated next to me during Fred's interview session contributed his thoughts: "I mean, do Korean men even do housework after getting married? I heard they don't. There is proof that they are fake gentlemen." Although these tourists may appear to have overly pessimistic opinions about Korean men, I have encountered cases in which some of their pessimism seemed to be founded on realistic concerns. For example, many Hallyu tourists told me anecdotal stories about "creepy Korean men" who were so hungry for sex that they became nuisances to the tourists by pestering them. In almost every hostel I stayed in throughout my fieldwork, there seemed to be at least one Korean man who stayed at the hostels and pestered female Hallyu tourists. At first glance, these men would appear romantic and considerate, but once one became more acquainted with them, one would realize that they would actually indiscriminately attempt to have sex with any and all foreign tourists; some of them even displayed sexually predatory behavior. Whenever these men attempted to engage my Hallyu tourist informants in conversation, my informants would secretly share exasperated glances with each other, roll their eyes, and whisper about them behind their backs. My Hallyu tourist informants would warn each other about these men so that their fellow tourists could guard themselves against these men's "fake romantic" advances.

James, another male French tourist, saw Korean men as misogynistic. James was slender and of medium height. Whenever I saw him, he always seemed to sit slouched in a chair. He had a balding and shaved head. He said to me:

> I have a Korean feminist activist friend in France who told me the misogyny of Korean men. There is a specific word emm… I cannot remember… that refer to Korean men who successfully rode White or foreign girls? The guys use the word as some kind of prize? You know the word? Let me look up the word for you.

James began typing and scrolling on his phone to try to find the word that exemplified the misogyny of Korean men. I later learned that the word that he was describing was "*baekma*." In Korean, the literal translation of it is white horse. Alternatively, and colloquially, it equates white women to horses because both can be "ridden" by men whenever they desire. Their consent is not necessary because they are supposedly available at the whims and desires of their riders (in this case, Korean men). It is a sexually violent conception of white women which assumes that they are always hypersexual and sexually available. According to this problematic discourse, it is impossible to "coerce" or "sexually assault" white women because they are supposedly always willing to have sex. I learned from Google searches that the word is often used in the sentence "*baekma tada*" literal translation being "to ride a white horse" which implies having sex with white women. Even a casual Google image search of the word brings up two different sets of images: sexual images of scantily clad white women and images of actual four-legged white horses. Many of the photos are advertisements of white female sex workers available in Korea. The existence and the prevalence of such terminology that sexualizes and objectifies white women's bodies indicates that these foreign male tourists' concerns about the Korean men's alleged façade of innocent boyishness may not be completely baseless. Furthermore, as I will analyze in the following section, my Korean male informants' racialized erotic desires for white

women seemed to partly stem from their dissatisfaction with what they deemed to be cumbersome Korean femininity. In the following section, I will analyze how some of my Korean male informants essentialized both white femininity and Korean femininity in their attempts to explain their racialized desires for white women. In these essentialist discourses, some of my Korean male informants exaggerated the alleged differences between white women and Korean women.

The Juxtaposition of White Women and Korean Women in Korean Men's Racialized Desires

I plopped down on a dank brown vinyl sofa which faced a pool table in the dim and humid basement serving as the hostel lounge. The walls were painted blood red. Next to the pool table were several plastic chairs and round tables that were littered with beer cans and *soju* bottles.[41] There were also miscellaneous game machines such as dart and pinball machines lining the walls adjacent to the pool table. Two white women from Belgium and France were playing pool. I was absentmindedly observing the women playing pool when I inadvertently overheard two Korean men talking on a couch adjacent to mine. "That one is a nine and a five… And that one is a two and an eight." "No that short girl is more like a ten and a seven!" The two men were talking in Korean but they seemed to be talking in some kind of coded language. They talked freely in front of me presumably because they thought that I did not speak Korean. After listening to their conversation for a while, I finally understood what they were saying. They were numerically evaluating the two women playing pool as if they were judges in a beauty pageant. The first number represented the points they gave to the women's breasts while the second

[41] Soju is a Korean traditional hard liquor.

number referred to their hips and legs. They continued, "That short girl has enough of everything. I guess more than enough. Those kinds of breasts do not exist among Korean girls. What is that like a D cup? Korean chicks don't have that kind of body." The woman they were talking about leaned over the pool table, very much engaged in her game of pool, and unaware that she was being evaluated by these two Korean men. "Yeah they are pretty amazing. On the other hand, that tall girl over there, she has nothing to show on top and everything on the bottom. God gifted her with amazing hips but no breasts. That's sad." They were silent for a while, observing the women walking about in front of them playing pool. "Who would you go for?" "The tall one definitely. Those kind of legs are something you can only get in those *seoyang* (Western) chicks."

The two women who were Hallyu tourists were not very fluent in Korean so they were not fully cognizant of the fact that they were the subjects of this lewd conversation.[42] The short Belgian woman approached one of the Korean men sitting on the sofa and said: "Play together!" He smiled and stood up to join their pool game. He did not attempt anything sexual while playing pool with her, and he behaved and talked innocently as though he had not just sexually objectified her. These Hallyu tourists presumably saw this Korean man as one of the romantic and gentlemanly Korean men whom they imagined they would find in Korea.

In their sexually explicit and sexist conversation, the two Korean men were explicitly comparing *seoyang* (Western) women with Korean women; the *seoyang* women were seen as embodying certain traits lacking in Korean women. The Korean men I observed, as well as those whom I interviewed, used such binary categorization between "Western" and Korean women. In this particular discourse, white women's bodies were idealized as opposed to the less than ideal

[42] They were not fluent in English or Korean so I could not ask them to participate in my research.

bodies of Korean women who – according to them – lacked big breasts and glamorous legs. As Gupta and Ferguson (1992) claim, (cultural) differences are created through a difference-producing set of relations rather than the innate and biological difference between cultures. In the conversation between the two Korean men, white Hallyu tourists were caricatured, objectified, and sexualized in relation to an equally simplistic perception of Korean women.

Tourists' gender plays a significant factor in the amount of privilege and respect awarded to them in transnational relationships. While German male tourists in Denise Brennan's research (2001) could freely roam around in the Dominican Republic and be respected by the locals due to their wealthy white male status, female tourists were not awarded as much privilege as their male counterparts. For example, in Paulla Ebron's (1997) article on romance tourism in the Gambia, while the white female romance tourists are treated with respect to their faces, when they were absent the locals talked about the promiscuity and haplessness of these white women. In these discourses, "Western" white women were deemed to be foolish and sexually promiscuous: these discourses defined white women as sexually indiscriminate and therefore morally reprehensible. Similarly, in the above case of Korean men judging the Hallyu tourists' bodies, they were overtly sexualizing these women in comparison to the supposedly less-sexually appealing bodies of Korean women.

Korean men's comparisons between white women and Korean women did not end at the physical/aesthetic level: they extend to the comparison of these two groups of women's supposedly different sexual behaviors. In one particular interview session, my informants' preconceptions of *seoyang* (Western) women's "promiscuity" were directly contrasted to Korean women's (my own) virtuousness. Michael was the owner of one of the hostels where I was conducting my research. Although he was in his late thirties, his youthful style made him appear

to be in his twenties. He sported a trendy asymmetrical haircut in which one side of his hair was considerably longer while the other side was almost shaven off. He meticulously styled his hair with wax every day so that the longer hairs would be combed back and textured with wax. Most days he would wear baggy basketball shorts that came to his knees and an oversized tank top as well as a baseball cap. He was extremely tall. He spoke fluent English compared to other Korean hostel owners with whom I interacted. He was also much younger than other hostel owners – who were at least ten or twenty years his senior. Michael liked to spend time with his guests; he partied with them almost every night.

After a particularly wild night of partying, Michael shuffled back into the hostel the next morning. He plopped down on the sofa where I was interviewing a British male tourist Ben. Michael said, "Speaking of yesterday…" He paused as he quickly eyed and contemplated me sitting on the other side of the couch. He said in Korean, "I am sorry for what I am about to say. It seems like an inappropriate topic to raise in front of a lady." I assured him I would not take offense at what he was about to say. He lowered his voice considerably and said, almost in a whisper barely audible for us three, "Did you hear the Swedish girls talking last night and this morning?" Ben nodded his head and said, "Yeah they were really…" Michael completed his sentence, "I think the word you are looking for is 'wild.' Some of these 'Western' girls (tourists) are just so wild." "About what?" I asked. Michael responded, "I just ask them how was your night and they go into detail like, 'Oh we went to X club and met some Korean guys and had sex it was ok but she had more fun than me' they say!" Michael snorted and continued,

> Based on the tone of their voice, they sound like they are saying 'oh she had more fun than me, next time I am going to do more extreme stuff and have more fun

> sex than her!' Even guys don't say all those stuff in detail when talking to other guys, but these girls are telling me, a guy, about how they had all this wild sex. These Western girls... They have sex, they talk about sex…

Ben agreed enthusiastically, "Yeah I am so surprised that they share all that with us guys. When I listen to them talking sometimes I am just amazed [at the amount of private sexual details they share]! The things they do and say… Korean girls would never do something like that, would they?" He looked at me to agree with his rhetorical question. Just in time, a guest hauled her luggage out of the tiny elevator connected to the hostel, and Michael jumped up to check her into the hostel, so our interview halted for a few minutes. It saved me from having to answer Ben's rhetorical question.

Michael, a Korean man, and Ben, a British tourist shared their mild disdain towards Swedish Hallyu tourists' open sexuality. Even though Ben was from Britain, he fervently agreed with Michael regarding his disdain for the supposed overt sexuality of the Swedish Hallyu tourists. Ben even juxtaposed the Swedish women's behaviors with that of "virtuous" Korean women who would supposedly never flaunt and discuss their sexuality in such a way. In these two men's discourse, "Korean femininity" and "Western femininity" are pitted against each other to affirm Orientalist and essentialist ideologies of cultural difference. Although Ben seemed to be complimenting Korean women's virtues, what he said was not necessarily a compliment. Ben merely drew on the Orientalist stereotype of "Asian femininity" to demean "Western" female sexuality.

Asian women and "Western" white women are frequently juxtaposed against each other to promote the male notion of how "proper" women should act. Amy Sueyoshi (2018) analyzes

the emergence of Asian geisha stereotype in the US. According to Sueyoshi, the "geisha" stereotype emerged and gained popularity in the US in juxtaposition to white women's feminist movements in the nineteenth century. These feminist movements called for women to become physically strong and financially independent. The mainstream US media juxtaposed geisha stereotypes with discourses of "new" white middle-class womanhood. The media embraced the geisha trope as the ideal femininity brimming with docility and subservience – qualities supposedly lacking in the new white womanhood touted by women's rights movements. Hence, in the nineteenth century US, racialized desires for East Asian women were formulated in juxtaposition to – and in competition with – white femininity. In the context of Hallyu tourism, Korean men's racialized erotic desires for white women are likewise formulated through their comparison to Korean femininity. In this manner, discourses of racialized erotic desires are produced through a difference-making set of relations which create imagined binaries between the "East" and the "West."

As a case in point, while discussing the allegedly unbridled sexuality of the Swedish tourists, Ben referred back to me, a Korean woman, to affirm the discourse of docile and virtuous Asian feminine sexuality that contrasted with the discourse of the uncontrollable sexuality of "Western" women. Here, Ben was using culturally essentialist ideology regarding romance and sexuality to contrast the "West" to "Korea" to create a patriarchal ideal of how women should act. These binaristic discourses are disseminated through media. Gina Marchetti (1994) claims that when Hollywood films portray interracial relationships between the "West" and Asia, the romantic heroes, who are invariably white, are depicted as "rescuing" the Asian heroines from their own cultures through the power of love. According to Marchetti, Asian women in these films are depicted as sacrificing themselves for love, while Caucasian women in these same

movies are depicted as independent and dangerous. In such a way, binary constructions of "Eastern" and "Western" sexuality/romance have historically contrasted Asian women with "Western" women to make two points: one, that Asian women are oppressed in their culture and prevented from the liberating experiences of love, and two, that "Western" white women are too liberal and sexual compared to the "docile" and "innocent" Asian women.

Such comparisons echo larger essentialist and racist discourses surrounding romance and sex. According to Caren Kaplan (2001), even some "Western" feminists ascribe to such essentialist ideologies of love. In analyzing Hillary Clinton's transnational travel to North Africa as a first lady in the midst of Bill Clinton's sex scandal, Kaplan points to how the US news media and Clinton herself imparted all forms of gender-based problems onto the non-Western "Other." Meanwhile, the domestic issues that disturbed Clinton – Bill Clinton's infidelity, US media's sexist attacks against Hillary Clinton – were swept under the rug. In the larger context, these practice suggest that some "Western" feminists (Kaplan calls them "global feminists") employ discourses of non-Western women's romantic and sexual "oppression" while pointing to "Western" cultures as pinnacles of gender equality and female liberation.

My male informants also adhered to such binary discourses that juxtaposed "Western" women to Korean women. However, they used the same logic in reverse to criticize "Western" women's supposed promiscuity. When he returned from checking in his guests, Michael plopped down on the sofa again and the conversation turned to his critique of Korean women. He said, "Ugh, Korean girls… I don't like how Korean girls need to constantly text. When I go three days without texting them, they are like, 'Why didn't you text me during those three days?' It somehow becomes all my fault! But I say, 'Why didn't YOU text me during that time?' You know? And they say guys should text first and all that nonsense but see…It isn't all my fault."

After taking a breath from his rant, he looked my way and said, “Sorry for saying that about Korean women in front of you.” In spite of wanting to contest his argument, I told him I did not take offense. He continued his rant as if he was waiting for me to give him permission. He said,

> Korean girls worry and text too much. They want proof of love every three seconds and make themselves out to be something more than even our mothers are in our lives. For example, the boyfriend was at her house 20 minutes ago, but she makes the boyfriend text every minute he is walking back home. Nothing happened in between leaving her home 20 minutes ago and arriving at his home. That’s just psycho stuff that normal Korean girls do!

Ben nodded his head in agreement, and encouraged by the gesture, Michael continued,

> My current girlfriend is 26 and I’m 36. Neither of us has to worry about each other that much! We have lived just fine on our own before we met each other. For the past ten years I haven’t even told my mom where I am and whether I ate lunch or what I had for dinner! Why do I have to inform my girlfriend when I don’t even do that for my mom? My current girlfriend doesn’t do that she is fine but I wonder if it is because I told her I don’t like that or she is just that kind of cool, unconventional Korean girl.

“Oh so you told her to not do that?” I asked to which he replied proudly, “Yes I specifically told her not to nag me or we have to break up.” Michael’s dissatisfaction with Korean women’s

clingy-ness is juxtaposed with his discourse of the Hallyu tourists who are supposedly not as emotionally demanding or controlling of their male love interests.

According to Michael's discourse, "Western" women are desirable because they do not demand as much emotional commitment as Korean women. In particular, Hallyu tourists do not even get a chance to be "clingy" because they are in Korea for a short amount of time. Based on my Korean male informants' discourses, foreign tourists – specifically so-called "Western" white Hallyu tourists – are desirable because they are sexually available but are less demanding of men's time and emotions than the "pesky" Korean women who demand relationships and emotional availability. Furthermore, Hallyu tourists became the primary "targets" for some of my Korean male informants because these tourists already fantasized and desired Korean men due to Korean television dramas.

The desires of my Korean male informants resonate with what Elizabeth Bernstein (2007) calls "bounded intimacy." Bernstein theorizes "bounded intimacy" in the context of relationships between sex workers and their customers and argues that these relationships cannot be defined as strictly sexual or emotional. Rather, these relationships are shaped by a "bounded intimacy" that is at once sexual and emotional, transient and stable, fungible and durable. The Korean men whom I observed seemed to want this type of "bounded intimacy" with "Western" white women because of the masculine prestige associated with dating and having sex with white women. These men did not see their relationships with Hallyu tourists as lasting relationships that could potentially turn into long-distance relationships and marriage. However, many of them treated the Hallyu tourists as lovers and girlfriends during the duration of their stay in Korea. Some Hallyu tourists left Korea after being satisfied and fulfilled by such short-term intimate relationships while others left Korea, hoping that upon their next trip to Korea, they would be

able to find something more long-lasting.

Conclusion

Dominant discourses of Korean masculinity have historically been influenced by transnational forces such as Japanese colonialism, the Korean War, and the US military stationed in Korea. I contend that the transnational popularity of Hallyu is a new transnational phenomenon that is influencing discourses of Korean masculinity in the twenty-first century. Even though Hallyu in its strictest form means the export of Korean popular culture contents, more broadly, it represents a cultural interaction between Korea and the cultures of Hallyu fans. Through Hallyu dramas, images of Korean men as emotionally sensitive and romantic get circulated and consumed by viewers all over the world. Some women who consume such images visit Korea as Hallyu tourists to meet the men of their dreams. In the intimate relationships between these female tourists and Korean men, various gender norms, racialized erotic desires, and racialized fantasies intermingle to shape discourses of Korean masculinity.

Some of my Hallyu tourist informants desired Korean men based on the essentialist as well as idealized perceptions they had of Asian/Korean men. Meanwhile, the Korean men I observed also longed for encounters with the white women tourists based on their respective racialized desires for these women. The phrase *saranghae* (I love you) became crucial for my Korean male informants who attempted to create a romantic persona that, supposedly, made them sexually competitive against men of other races in attracting white women.

My Korean male informants' racialized desires primarily revolved around white women. Some Korean men described them as "cool" women who would not pressure them into long term relationships after sexual intercourse. They also noted that the supposed sexual promiscuity of

Hallyu tourists contrasted with the clingy attitudes of Korean women. Inspired by stereotypes of "Western" women's sexual nonchalance, some Korean men actively sought "Western" white Hallyu tourists as sexual partners.

My Korean male informants' racialized desires for "Western" white women appeared to be situated in the long history of an ambivalence regarding interracial relationships. In essence, Korean men's racialized desires for "Western" white women reflect complex ways in which discourses of Korean masculinity, as well as national and cultural identities, are articulated in transnational and trans-racial contexts.

Coda

Soft Power, Netflix, and Hallyu

In this dissertation, I have analyzed Korean television dramas through the theoretical frameworks of erotics, transnationalism, and fan studies. More specifically, I analyzed depictions of "soft" masculinities in Korean television dramas (Chapter 2); Korean drama producers' and writers' perspectives regarding television dramas' national and transnational viewers (Chapter 3); the online spaces through which Hallyu fans fantasized about the "soft" masculinities of Korean men (Chapter 4); how Hallyu tourists attempted to make their erotic fantasies come true by forming intimate relationships with Korean men in "real life" (Chapter 5); and Korean men's perspectives on their intimate relations with the Hallyu tourists (Chapter 6). By exploring these interconnected subjects regarding the global popularity of Korean television dramas, I suggest that Korean dramas facilitate multiple forms of transnational intimacy. I posit that the racialized erotic fantasies espoused by my informants were not merely whimsical or unrealistic figments of their imaginations that could be cast aside as irrelevant; rather, television drama-inspired fantasies guided the "real life" activities of my informants and these, in turn, facilitated intimate relationships between them and Korean men. Furthermore, such fantasies enabled the generation of billions of dollars in profit for Korean corporations through tourism and the export of Hallyu-related merchandise.

In this Coda, I analyze two discrete themes relevant to this research that I did not discuss in previous chapters. First, I analyze the Korean government's efforts to use Hallyu to obtain global soft power. I ask: Does soft power exist? If so, how are television dramas helping or hurting the Korean government's efforts to obtain global soft power? Are there ways in which

Hallyu could be analyzed beyond the theoretical framework of soft power?

Second, I analyze the relationship between Hallyu and Netflix. I pose the question: How could Netflix potentially influence the production, circulation, and consumption of Hallyu? I mention Netflix to underscore that Hallyu is a dynamic phenomenon: the websites I analyzed in this research (i.e. Rakuten Viki, Soompi) may disappear due to Netflix, and new Korean television drama fan forums and streaming platforms may emerge in the place of those that lose traction. The questions I pose in this Coda are not meant to be rhetorical; they are intended to be open-ended questions that may be explored further in future research on Korean television dramas and Hallyu.

Beyond Soft Power

Academic discourses on Hallyu often analyze its significance in terms of Korean nationalism. For instance, according to Jeongsuk Joo (2011), Korean government officials describe the global success of Hallyu as the symbol of Korea's global triumph. Hye Kyung Lee (2013) contends that Hallyu epitomizes Korea's nationalist desire: through Hallyu, Lee believes, Korea wants foreigners to approve of Korean culture and legitimize Korean cultural superiority. However, do transnational Hallyu fans actually buy into the Korean government's nationalist aspirations? My Hallyu tourist informants and the Hallyu fans who commented on online forums appeared to interpret Korean television dramas to suit their own erotic needs rather than the needs of the Korean government. In that case, does Hallyu actually facilitate Korean soft power?

Throughout this research, I have shown that Korean television dramas influenced how my informants imagined Korea. Furthermore, the popularity of Hallyu tourism and the increase in international exchange students at Korean universities indicate that Hallyu seems to have

favorably influenced the global image of the country: Korea is now imagined as a desirable destination (Shim 2007). Furthermore, according to Kyungjae Jang (2019), since the end of the Korean War, the Korean government has been using television dramas as tools for propaganda against communism (particularly North Korea). Jang claims, "South Korea's soft power strategy is not simply a national branding strategy. It also forms part of the broader ideological confrontation with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (hereafter North Korea or DPRK) and is a counterbalance to North Korean propaganda" (25). In that regard, some North Korean defectors' claims that North Koreans secretively gather in each other's houses to watch contraband South Korean television dramas appear to prove the success of Korean television dramas in promoting the Korean government's propaganda and aspirations for soft power.[43]

However, Joseph Nye and Youna Kim (2013) highlight the ambiguous nature of soft power to ask: to what extent does Korean soft power sway other countries' foreign policy decisions in favor of Korea? For instance, would the US enact favorable trade agreements with Korea because of Hallyu and the favorable image of Korea among its fans? Ian Hall and Frank Smith (2013) argue that the contest for soft power is meaningless; they believe that there is no evidence that soft power actually works to favorably influence the policies of nations. They go as far as to say that the competition for soft power between nations just create grounds for more competition for "hard power."

In an article detailing Korea's policies on Hallyu, Nissim Otmazgin (2011) argues that it is counterintuitive for the government to intervene in cultural industries like Hallyu. According to Otmazgin, while the success of cultural industries comes from the cultivation and valorization

[43] Many North Korean refugees to South Korea claim that their imaginations about South Korea were based on the South Korean television dramas that they secretly watched while they were living in the north. For an example of what they say, watch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iuMM8vurbhQ

of an individual's creativity, government interventions and structures only interfere with such practices. Otmaszin observes that Hallyu did not start as a government project; instead, the Korean entertainment industry's entrepreneurial explorations and demands of foreign market created Hallyu. Thus, Otmaszin suggests:

> An important recommendation is that the state should not attempt to deliberately obtain "soft power" from the proliferation of its pop culture. In pop culture, state-run institutions work much less efficiently than the forces working outside the domain of centralized control. The diplomatic course of cultural exports should be left solely to consumers to determine, as governmental attempts to wield political benefits have so far proven to be futile, if not harmful (322).

Otmazgin's argument is supported by the long track record of Hallyu-related projects the Korean government – both federal and municipal – initiated and flubbed.

For example, Sangkyun Kim and Chanwoo Nam (2016) critiques the Korean government for wasting money on fruitless and short-term plans regarding Hallyu tourism. They state that, despite the popularity of Hallyu tourism, there have not been any *meaningful* government policies geared towards the sustainable popularity of Hallyu tourism. In an article published in 2016, they list several government-initiated plans to boost Hallyu tourism. For instance, in the years leading up to 2016, the Korean government proposed the construction of a "Hallyu complex center" and "Hallyu experience facilities," both of which were meant to facilitate an increase in Hallyu tourism. Furthermore, they also pointed to the government's plans to build a "Hallyu star street" and "K-pop concert halls."

Several years have passed since Kim and Nam's article was published in 2016. Did these government-facilitated projects come to fruition? Are they invigorating Hallyu tourism? During my field research in 2018, I followed up on these government-proposed projects that Kim and Nam mentioned in their article. Almost none of the government plans listed in Kim and Nam's article were implemented. For example, I found a project similar to the "Hallyu complex center" renamed as "K-Culture Valley project" in Goyang city. According to newspaper articles, the project began construction in 2015 but was still incomplete as of 2018 (Lee 2018). In fact, as of 2018, construction companies were unable to proceed with further construction because of legal issues related to government permits for the project. A newspaper from Goyang city reported that only 20% of the construction has been completed during the four years between 2015 and 2018 (Lee 2018). Similarly, in 2018, the K-pop arena was still in its developing stages with no concrete timeline regarding when the project will actually come to fruition (Seo 2018).

Despite the failure of many of these government-initiated projects, the popularity of Hallyu and Hallyu tourism has been growing. This implies that these major constructions and government-initiated multi-billion-dollar plans may not be what primarily facilitate Hallyu and Hallyu tourism. The one "successful" project I found was the Hallyu Star Street in Seoul. It is a street lined with offices of all the major entertainment corporations including YG, SM, JYP, the three major companies that produce Hallyu idols. During my fieldwork in Korea, some of my Hallyu tourist informants told me they visited this street in hopes of seeing Korean celebrities.

Apart from the federal government's plans for Hallyu, numerous municipal-level Hallyu-related projects have utterly failed to attract Hallyu tourists. For instance, many Korean cities funded the building of Korean drama filming sets in their districts, but few of them had any success in garnering profit from these filming sites. In fact, many drama-filming sites were

constructed and went into ruins without accruing any sort of tourism-related profits. For example, from 1997 to 2012, 35 drama sets were built around Korea using $152 million of municipal tax and $4 million in national tax. However, after being built, 26% of them had $0 revenues (Kim 2015b). Jae-chun, a small provincial city, devoted $1.4 million to build two drama sets. This city used tens of thousands of dollars in taxes annually as maintenance fee for the sets but ended up closing the sets years later when they failed to become popular as Hallyu tourist destinations (Kim 2015b). During my field research, only a few of my informants stated that they visited Korean drama filming sites; among those who said they visited a drama filming locale, all of them mentioned *Bukchon Hanok* Village which is a popular tourist destination regardless of its appearance in Korean television dramas.[44]

It is not my intent to discuss what the Korean government should or should not do with regards to Hallyu. Rather, I suggest that Hallyu has significance beyond its supposed political/soft power and economic benefits. I suggest that analyzing Hallyu through the theoretical frameworks of racialized desires and transnational intimacy offer new insights into its global popularity and significance.

Netflix and the Changing Hallyu Scene

In Chapter 4, I asserted that the transnational Hallyu fans formed transnational intimacies with each other through digital spaces. For example, my analysis of the Hallyu fan forum Soompi indicated that the fans used Soompi to interact with each other in "real-time." They illegally streamed Korean television dramas in "real-time" as they were being aired in Korea, and posted screen captures and comments about the dramas in ways that fostered transnationally

[44] The village still maintains the traditional Korean architectural style called *Hanok*. Many tourists to Korea visit this village in order to see traditional Korean architecture.

intimate encounters between Hallyu fans. Furthermore, in my analysis of the online streaming website Rakuten Viki, I pointed to the transnational intimacies formed through the website's unique "timed comments" function which not only offered viewers the space to share their erotic desires as they watch the dramas, but also made the solitary activity of streaming the dramas feel communal. In this regard, each digital Hallyu platform offered unique methods and opportunities for viewers to enter into diverse transnational intimacies.

What does Netflix offer to Hallyu fans? In other words, how does Netflix potentially change the dynamics of Hallyu and Korean television drama-inspired transnational intimacies? In the US, the most prominent Korean drama streaming sites were Dramafever and Rakuten Viki. However, without any warning, Dramafever closed overnight in 2018, leaving many transnational fans befuddled.[45] As of 2020, Rakuten Viki remains one of the most prominent online streaming websites that specifically provides streaming services for Southeast/East Asian television dramas. There are other streaming websites operate purely through fan labor without mega-corporations' sponsorship. At such websites, the fans volunteer to subtitle the dramas, upload them, and maintain the websites. However, such fan-driven streaming websites appear and disappear frequently due to copyright infringement issues. As the sudden shutdown of Dramafever and the ephemerality of fan-organized streaming websites indicate, Korean television dramas have not been easily accessible to transnational fans.

However, in recent years, Korean television dramas are becoming increasingly

[45] The situation became even messier when former executive of Dramafever sued its parent-company, Warner Bros, for wrongful termination. Chung H. Chang, the former president of Dramafever, stated that Warner Bros shut down the popular website due to possible copy-right infringement issues, but that the decision was also motivated by the corporation's anti-Asian bias. Chang claimed that he was personally subjected to many racially insensitive and discriminatory instances in Warner Bros board meetings and that such instances indicated the company's anti-Asian mindset that worked against the preservation of Dramafever (Perman 2019).

transnationally accessible and "mainstream," in large part due to Netflix. Additionally, Korean dramas are expanding their transnational ventures through their connection with Netflix. The collaboration between Netflix and Korean television production companies is not unique: Netflix funds and produces television shows in various countries around the world. Nonetheless, in the context of Korean television dramas, Netflix broadens Korean television dramas' potential audience-pool by making them more accessible and available to transnational viewers. While online streaming websites like Dramafever or Rakuten Viki specifically cater to a subset of transnational television watchers actively seeking streaming services for Korean dramas, Netflix makes the dramas accessible to those who do not know – or have never seen – them before. In other words, it offers Korean television dramas as entertainment options to those who may not have considered viewing them if they were not so readily available through Netflix.

The relationship between Korean television dramas and Netflix is reminiscent of the way that K-pop strategically used YouTube as the platform through which to garner transnational success. According to Kent Ono and Jungmin Kwon (2013), those who were unaware of the existence of K-pop first became acquainted with it by viewing random K-pop music videos available on YouTube. Youna Kim (2013b) asserts K-pop became transnationally popular through YouTube because it provided an apt platform to showcase K-pop's visually flamboyant music videos. As a case in point, Korean singer Psy gained popularity around the world through his funny *Gangnam Style* music video on YouTube. Through his success on YouTube, Psy was able to expand his fame beyond YouTube: in the US, he performed on American Music Awards and appeared on mainstream shows like *The Ellen Show*.

The question then arises: could Netflix serve as a useful platform to provide transnational success for Korean television dramas? Among the Korean dramas offered on Netflix, dramas like

Stranger (2017), *Something in the Rain* (2018), and *Mr. Sunshine* (2018) were available on Netflix at the same time that they were aired on Korean television. In Chapter 4, I discussed the tactics utilized by transnational fans to view Korean dramas at the same time that they were airing in Korea (the fans called it watching the shows "live"). Even though those "live streaming" shows were not subtitled, these viewers did not appear to care about that because they were more focused on *emotionally* understanding the dramas and connecting with other fans who were experiencing the same emotions. Now, select Korean dramas are available in real-time *with* subtitles on Netflix, and fans do not have to go through illegal channels to access the dramas "live." However, making dramas available simultaneously in Korea and around the world presents potentially significant changes in the production methods. Such changes may drastically alter the emotional intimacies between the drama writers and the viewers (analyzed in Chapter 3) as well as those among transnational fans (analyzed in Chapters 4).

To make the dramas simultaneously available on Netflix and Korean television networks, the dramas cannot be filmed in "live production" – the current modus operandi of Korean drama production. The dramas have to be pre-produced to some extent. As I note in Chapter 3, pre-production is not a popular method of filming Korean dramas because broadcasting corporations and production companies want to gauge viewers' emotions in order to alter their scripts. Pre-production limits such interactions between producers and viewers because all episodes would already have been shot before any of them were shown to the audience. Thus far, with very few exceptions, pre-produced Korean dramas have been unsuccessful.

However, for better or for worse, Netflix appears to be slowly shifting the production culture for Korean television dramas. A prime example is a Netflix-funded drama *Mr. Sunshine* which features a star-studded cast and beautiful cinematography. Netflix made a generous

investment in the project: among the $410 million production fee for the drama, Netflix funded $300 million (Hwang 2018b). The drama was mostly – though not fully – pre-produced before broadcast. *Mr. Sunshine* was highly successful both in Korea and abroad. The drama aired on Korean television network tvN and each episode was simultaneously made available for streaming on Netflix.

Korean television industry opinions are divided as to whether pre-production should be the modus operandi in Korean drama production. The aforementioned pre-produced drama *Mr. Sunshine* took almost a year to complete filming (in contrast, the typical "live production" of a 20-episode drama in Korea would only take 3-4 months) (Hwang 2018a). Since the drama production staff had ample time to focus on fine-tuning the drama, *Mr. Sunshine* displayed epic cinematography and mise-en-scene. *Mr. Sunshine* was able to endure the year-long production schedule because it received massive funding from Netflix. However, what happens to dramas that are less well-funded? Would those dramas still benefit from pre-production?

The "live-production" method is relatively cheap because it takes less production time, which means lower labor costs. Furthermore, such a method of production permits producers and writers to incorporate viewers' feedback into plot. On the other hand, "live-production" creates an inhumane work environment by forcing the production staff and actors to work regardless of disasters or personal emergencies because each episode needs to be ready by the broadcasting deadline, failing which they would risk losing their jobs. Due to the "live-production" style of filming Korean television dramas, there were cases in which drama production staff were seriously injured or died during filming due to accidents caused by exhaustion and lack of sleep. In some cases, actors and actresses had to resume filming the dramas hours after fainting and being rushed to emergency rooms due to exhaustion. Therefore, I am not implying that "live-

production" is the ideal method by which Korean television dramas should be produced. Stronger unions and labor-related laws should be in place to protect the drama staff and the actors from such inhumane work environments.

However, would pre-production solve all the latent problems of live-production? The most calamitous example of a failed attempt at pre-production is the Korean drama entitled *Lion (Saja)*. The drama was supposed to finish filming by May 2018 and begin editing to be aired in January of 2019, but it had only filmed half of the drama by the May deadline. In May, the main actors of the drama resigned because of scheduling conflicts: the actors expected the drama to finish filming by May of 2018 and preemptively signed contracts to work in other film projects scheduled to begin in June. Hence, when the filming of *Lion* was not completed by May, the actors resigned to work in other projects to which they were already contracted. The producers and staff were left in limbo as they contemplated how they could proceed with a half-produced drama which could neither be aired nor thrown away (Kim 2018). This example indicates that even though pre-production offers more humane work environments and higher quality dramas, it also presents risks because of the dominant production culture of Korean television dramas. In other words, merely changing the production style from "live" production to pre-production would only bring new problems if such changes do not occur in conjunction with a major overhaul of the Korean television industry and its labor practices.

Some people in the drama industry suggest half pre-production as a solution to the limits of "live production" and full pre-production: it would hypothetically amend the hectic live-production schedule as well as retain some possibilities for feedback from viewers (Yu 2013). As the Netflix-funded series *Mr. Sunshine* indicates, Korean television drama production may be moving towards half pre-production due to transnational demands for Korean television dramas.

Would Netflix eventually monopolize the transnational Korean television drama streaming market? What does Netflix's involvement in the online streaming of Korean television dramas mean for other digital Hallyu spaces (i.e. fan-organized Korean drama streaming websites, Rakuten Viki)? Unlike Rakuten Viki which offers "timed comments" through which viewers could share their desires and create transnational intimacies with other viewers, Netflix does not offer a comment section let alone a "timed comments" section. What does this lack of interaction among fans mean for the transnational intimacies created through digital Hallyu spaces? Would Netflix significantly alter how Hallyu fans and tourists erotically desire Korean men?

Conclusion

The higher production costs and big-money investments in the Korean dramas and the Hallyu tourism industry –from the Korean government as well as global corporations like Netflix – means that Korean television dramas are becoming powerful forces to be reckoned with. They have become one of Korea's primary "objects" of export. However, more significantly, I contend that Korean television dramas are transnational media that shape transnational viewers' fantasies and desires. Hallyu is a phenomenon driven by emotions and erotics such that the desires of Hallyu tourists, Korean men, drama writers, and producers, along with national, transnational, Orientalist erotic desires, intertwine to produce "real life" and digital forms of transnational intimacies. Multiple forms of erotic desires come together through Hallyu to complicate the supposed binaries of East versus the West, masculinity versus femininity, and fantasy versus reality.

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