Contemporary Korean Culture & the Korean Culture Wave

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Office Hours: TBA

Course Description

The year 2012 saw K-pop star Psy appearing nearly everywhere. Not only did his Gangnam Style music video become the most frequently watched Youtube in cyber space, but the Korean singer seemed to take the world stage by storm, from performing his signature dance moves with the likes of Britney Spears and Madonna to rendering multiple acts of parodies for the global audience. But long before this K-pop phenom struck a cord with global audiences, box sets of the latest Korean TV drama series have become staple items in Chinatown stores around the globe. Korean directors and actors are gradually making inroads in Hollywood while the popularity of Korean cuisine and language courses around the world seem to grow at a noticeable rate. Such things looked impossible some twenty years ago, but hallyu, or the Korean Culture Wave, seems to have reached a new pinnacle, offering a constant menu of fresh and ever-changing faces and trends for the enthralment of global consumers.

How can we define this ever-morphing movement called hallyu? When did it start? What is the reason behind its sustained popularity, which has transformed South Korea into a major cultural hub? What are the dark shadows of hallyu, which, for the most part, has been explored through the glowing prism of Koran national pride? How does this brand of seemingly inoculous and even frivolous popular entertainment profoundly impact the way Korean national identity is imagined while simultaneously striving to appeal to global fandom? This course attempts to explore these questions by looking into representative films, TV dramas, K-pop music, and new media entertainment, which have enjoyed a worldwide circulation and have collectively created the complex phenomenon of hallyu as we know of it today. While the course is organized according to genres and media platforms, there will be recurring themes—production and consumption, star system and fandom, bodily aesthetics, urban development and tourism—to capture the dynamics of hallyu.

Course Requirements

--Mandatory attendance (one absence allowed for emergency)
--Active participation in class discussion
--Participation in excursions (details TBA)
--Collaboration with group members for final projects
Grading Policy

1. Participation in discussion (20%)
2. Weekly quizzes (30%)
3. Midterm paper (20%)
4. Final Group Project (30%)

1. I envision the main format of this class to be a respectful dialogue among students. Best learning takes place when we learn from all members of the class, and in this respect your active participation is crucial for a successful class experience. If you are not comfortable with impromptu participation in class, please talk to me and we will arrange a short in-class presentation on an assigned topic, which can be prepared in advance.

2. Every Thursday there will be short quizzes based on assigned reading and viewing materials for the given week. The purpose of quizzes or papers is to ensure you have mastered the contents in the assigned reading and viewing.

3. Midterm paper is a short essay (no more than 500 words) based on the topic, which will be announced in advance.

4. Final project can either be a creative performance (live or recorded) or an academic presentation based on any topics concerning hallyu. Whichever format your group chooses, creativity and collaboration are highly encouraged. Group assignments will be announced by the end of the second week so that the group members can start their projects early on. Once the group is formed, please make an appointment with me to discuss your project ideas during my office hours.

Texts & References

Course Packet will feature all the assigned reading materials. Viewing materials will be on reserve.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1. Introduction to Hallyu: How did it all begin?

T: Introduction to class
W: Lecture on the history of hallyu
R: Shiri, the first blockbuster film / in class quiz

o Viewing: Shiri
o Reading: Chi-Yun Shin and Julian Stringer, “Storming the Big Screen: The Shiri Syndrome” in Seoul Searching
Week 2. Korean Cinema on Global Screen

M: Old Boy (dir. Park Chan-wook)
  o Viewing: Old Boy
  o Reading: Kyung Hyun Kim, “Tell the Kitchen That There's Too Much Buchu in the Dumpling,” in Virtual Hallyu

T: The Host (dir. Bong Jun-jo)
  o Viewing: The Host

W: Pieta (dir. Kim Ki-duk, edgy auteur)
  o Viewing: Pieta
  o Reading: Steve Choe, “Kim Ki-duk's Cinema of Cruelty: Ethics and Spectatorship in the Global Economy,” in positions

R: Lecture: From Chungmuro To Hollywood / in class quiz

Week 3. TV Drama and Global Fandom

M: Winter Sonata (Japanese route of hallyu, Nostalgia, new consumerist fandom, masculinity)
  o Viewing: Winter Sonata excerpts
  o Reading: “Winter Sonata and Cultural Practices of Active Fans in Japan: Considering Middle-Aged Women as Cultural Agents” in East Asian Pop Culture

T: Jewel in the Palace (China and global, globalization of food commodity)
  o Viewing: Jewel in the Palace

W: Boys Over Flowers (Pan-Asianism, product placement, trope of class)
  o Viewing: Boys Over Flowers
  o Reading: “Renting East Asian Popular Culture for Local TV: Regional Networks of Cultural Production” in East Asian Pop Culture; “Structure of Identification and Distancing in Watching East Asian Television Drama” in East Asian Pop Culture

R: Lecture on drama production and tourism / bring your midterm to class / no quiz
Week 4. K-Pop as the New Epicenter of Hallyu

M: Girl power and the manufactured stardom (Wonder Girl, SNSD, KARA 2NE1)

- Viewing: music videos mentioned in the article (youtube)

T: From Pretty Boys to Bad Boys (SHINee, BIGBANG, BlockB)

- Viewing: music videos mentioned in the article (youtube)
- Reading: Jon Caramanica, “Beyond ‘Gangnam,’ the True Wild Heart of K-Pop BigBang Performs at the Prudential Center,” NY Times

W: Psy, the King of Youtube and the Body Freak

- Viewing: Gangnam Style music videos (youtube)

R: Lecture on KBS Superstar K-Pop TV show (Star is made not born) / in class quiz

Week 5. Hallyu in the New Media

M: Reality TV

- Viewing: BIGBANG TV, 2NE1TV (youtube)
- Reading: excerpts from Janet Staiger, Media Reception Studies; Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette eds, Reality TV

T: Fans sites

- Viewing: visit any Korean TV, music, film, celebrity fansites
- Reading Henry Jenkins, Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers

W: Commercials and product endorsement

- Viewing: youtube sites TBA
- Reading Laura Gray-Rosendale, Pop Perspectives

R: Course review / group presentation discussion
Week 6. Group Presentation and Wrap-Up

M: group 1, 2, 3
T: group 4, 5, 6
W: group 7, 8, 9
R: group 10, 11, 12