

Between Love and Hate: The New Korean Wave, Japanese Female Fans, and Anti-Korean Sentiment in Japan

Ji-Hyun Ahn¹ and E Kyung Yoon²

Despite the enormous success in Japan of Korean popular culture, including TV dramas and K-pop, over the past few decades, anti-Korean sentiment in the country has become increasingly visible and intense. In this article, we examine how young Japanese female fans of Korean popular culture engage with the Korean Wave discourse while also engaging with—or, rather, disengaging from—anti-Korean movements and hate speech. Whereas previous scholarship on the Korean Wave has emphasized the power of active fans' agency, this paper investigates how the fans who passionately and self-reflexively consume Korean popular culture understand and react to the growing anti-Korean sentiment in Japan. Through in-depth interviews with 15 of these fans in their 20s and 30s, we show how they have navigated the discursive space between appreciation for Korean culture and anti-Koreanism in Japan.

Keywords: Korean Wave, Japanese fans, soft power, anti-Korean sentiment, hate speech, Japan

¹ Ji-Hyun Ahn is Associate Professor of Communication at the University of Washington Tacoma (U.S.A.) and a corresponding author of this article (email: jhahn01@uw.edu). This research was funded by a Research Grant from the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS-2017-R48) and a Scholarship and Teaching Fund from the University of Washington Tacoma (2017–2018).

² E Kyung Yoon is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Sociology at Keio University (Japan).

1. Introduction

The Korean Wave (*hallyu* in Korean) has attracted considerable scholarly attention, especially in light of the global success of Korean pop music, drama, and online game among young people (Choi & Maliangkay, 2014; Chua & Iwabuchi, 2008; Y. Kim, 2013b; S. Lee & Nornes, 2015). The phenomenon epitomizes the transnational flow and dynamics of media and culture, and it has been explored from a broad range of perspectives, including those of academia, policy-making institutions, and industry. Within academia, important work has been done in disciplines ranging from media and cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, and gender studies to Korean and Asian studies (Jin & Kim, 2018).

Thus media and cultural studies scholars have highlighted the cultural implications of the transnational circulation and consumption of the Korean Wave and its role in the creation of an imaginative cultural space for young East Asian audiences in particular (Choi & Maliangkay, 2014; Chua & Iwabuchi, 2008; Yoon & Jin, 2017). The circulation of Korean popular culture has given rise to a transnational interpretive community of avid fans and consumers whose passion for Korean media and content transcends national borders. Especially noteworthy in this regard are a large number of studies addressing fans' pleasure in, labor on, and engagement with media and cultural texts that together serve as evidence of the importance of this perspective within Korean Wave studies³. In step with the phenomenon itself, the scholarship on audience reception and fan studies relating to the Korean Wave is becoming increasingly diverse in terms of both geography and ethnicity (Yoon & Kang, 2017).

However, the recent increase in anti-Korean sentiment across East Asia since the 2000s (the specific context of its emergence and development differs across countries and over time) indicates that the soft power that has propelled the success of South Korea (hereafter simply "Korea") needs to be understood in the context of a global climate of rising nativism and hate politics⁴. Specifically, the growing popularity of the Korean Wave has come to be viewed in some countries as a form of cultural invasion or of media and cultural imperialism (see Huang, 2009; Ainslie, Lipura, & Lim, 2017) that threatens national identity and cultural values. Furthermore, increasing geopolitical tensions owing to historical conflicts and ongoing territorial disputes in East Asia have given rise to unprecedented levels of anti-Korean sentiment (see Ahn, 2019; Ito, 2014). Thus, the Korean Wave has come to face various forms and levels of resistance, backlash, and resentment within the various countries in which Korean popular culture has been consumed.

Japan certainly offers intriguing insights into the tension between the fans' love of Korean popular culture and the society's increasing antagonism towards Korea and Koreans. Because of Japanese colonialism in Korea in the period from 1910 to 1945, Korea-Japan relations have been difficult and experienced many ups and downs. Both countries' history of mutual engagement in contemporary popular cultural products traces back to 1998, when the Korean government lifted

³ According to Yoon and Kang (2017, p. 8), of 76 academic papers published in English on the Korean Wave in the period from 2004 to 2016, 34 were devoted to the audiences of Korean drama and/or K-pop. Interestingly enough, "while most authors of English-written articles have an (active) audience's viewpoint, relatively more Korean scholars share a producer/exporter's perspective" (Yoon & Kang, 2017, p. 15).

⁴ Britain's withdrawal from the European Union (EU) known as "Brexit," the Trump administration's "Make America Great Again" slogan, and the reaction to the refugee crisis in Europe and around the globe well demonstrate the increasing popularity of nativist sentiments.

a ban on Japanese media and popular culture. Since that time, cultural exchange between the two countries has flourished, though it was only in the mid-2000s that Korean popular media and cultural content started to attract a broad national audience in Japan.

Today, according to the *2019 Whitepaper on Korean Wave* (2020, p. 117), Japan is one of the largest markets for Korean media and popular culture outside Korea. In fact, as the world's second-largest market for the music industry after the U.S., Japan remains the largest importer of K-pop: Korea exported music valued at \$320,599,000 to Japan in 2017, amounting to nearly two-thirds (62.5%) of Korea's exports in this sector, followed by China (21.4%), and Southeast Asia (12.6%) (*2018 Whitepaper on Korean Music Industry*, 2019, p. 133). Despite Japanese fans' great appetite for Korean popular culture, however, the antipathy between the two countries has resurfaced whenever their relationship has taken a turn for the worse.

Several factors fueled the rise of anti-Korean sentiment in Japan. To begin with, while Japan has long been considered the most economically advanced country in Asia, it has endured persistent economic stagnation since the economic crisis, popularly known as the “burst of bubble economy.” This sense of national economic insecurity has intensified as Japan has watched neighboring countries—especially Korea and China—become increasingly prominent in the global economy and their cultures become increasingly influential. In this context, a jingoistic, ultra-right-wing conservatism has achieved some popularity in Japan that has mobilized anti-Koreanism as part of its nationalist political agenda. Furthermore, Japan's history of colonialism in Korea remains a sore spot, as exemplified by the ongoing “comfort women” dispute. The anti-Korean hate speech of members of this political community has, then, become more prominent in recent years, especially when directed against ethnic Koreans living in Japan (see Ahn & Park, 2019; Higuchi, 2016; Itagaki, 2015).

It is in this context that we explore here Japanese fans' simultaneous engagement with Korean Wave discourse and disengagement from the growing anti-Korean protest and sentiment in Japan. Specifically, we consider these fans' navigation of the cultural space between their love of Korean popular culture and the rise of Japanese anti-Korean hate groups through in-depth interviews with 15 passionate female fans of the Korean Wave in their 20s and 30s. Unlike previous studies of the ways in which passionate audiences interpret media texts, we focus on the fans' navigation of and positioning of themselves within the discursive space created by the juxtaposition of the Korean Wave on the one hand and anti-Koreanism on the other. In so doing, our study shifts the emphasis away from regional audiences' fascination with Korean media and popular culture that characterized previous research to advance the understanding of how the fans' dynamics intersect with current geopolitical tensions in the region.

2. The Korean Wave, the New Korean Wave, and Anti-Korean Sentiment in Japan

In examining the development of the Korean Wave in Japan, it is useful to distinguish three periods corresponding to distinctive shifts in discourse about it. The phenomenal success of the Korean drama *Winter Sonata* on the country's national public broadcasting service NHK (the Japanese public broadcasting network) in 2004 initiated what has come to be known as the First Korean Wave in Japan. The significant impact of “*Winter Sonata* fever” on Japanese views of Korea has

been well documented (Harita, 2008; Hayashi & Lee, 2007; Joo, 2011; Mori, 2008). This First Korean Wave was driven by the popularity of the Korean drama among middle-aged Japanese women. The Second Korean Wave, lasting roughly from the late 2000s to the early 2010s, represented a shift in terms of genre, from drama/film to music, of demographics, from middle-aged women to those in their 20s and 30s, and of medium, from traditional mass media to social media and digital culture. This Second Wave was epitomized by K-pop idol groups that were intensively trained and carefully promoted by Korea's "big three" entertainment companies, SM, YG, and JYP, groups such as Girls' Generation, TVXQ, BIG BANG, and 2NE1.

Industry reports as well as academic research have identified a Third Korean Wave in Japan emerging in the mid-2010s and persisting through the period in which this research was conducted (2019 *Whitepaper on Korean Wave*, 2020; H. Lee, 2017; Han, 2014). The fans of the cultural products of the Third Korean Wave appear to be younger than those involved in the first two waves, mainly teenagers, whose fandom is rooted in social media. In the Third Korean Wave, Korean culture in general has become more pervasive in daily lives among young Japanese (especially teenage girls) in forms ranging from food to cosmetic brands, fashion, and make-up styles, though K-pop still represents the driving force behind this wave (H. Lee, 2017). In the academic literature, the Second and Third Korean Waves in Japan are generally referred to together as "*hallyu 2.0*" (S. Lee & Nornes, 2015) or the "New Korean Wave" (Jin, 2016). According to this line of research, in the era of digital media and creative industry, the latest Korean Wave is even more transnational than the previous one owing to the fundamental reshaping by new technologies of the ways in which Korean content is produced and consumed (Jung, 2015; Y. Kim, 2013a).

At the same time, however, anti-Korean sentiment emerged during the First Korean Wave and has increased in frequency and intensity since. Notable in this regard is the publication in 2005—only a few months after the aforementioned *Winter Sonata* fever—of a manga called *Ken-Kanryu* (literally, *Hating the Korean Wave*), one of the most sensational and best-selling anti-Korean books of all time in Japan. The unprecedented commercial success of the manga is not necessarily explicable solely as a backlash against the popularity of the First Korean Wave, but the phenomenon may have been in part responsible for triggering persistent Japanese anti-Korean sentiment that pre-dates the introduction of the Internet. In any case, the popularity of the manga is instructive regarding the place of anti-Koreanism in the broader context of the rise of the political far-right in contemporary Japan as well as the changing media and cultural landscapes accelerated by the rapid development of digital technologies.

Indeed, anti-Korean racist slurs had become common in such online Japanese forums as *2-Channel* (*2-channeru*), one of the largest and most popular and one well known for its far-right political stance, well before NHK broadcast *Winter Sonata*. Thus the rise of so-called "net right-wingers" (*netto-uyoku*) expressing extremely conservative ideologies online has coincided with a rapid increase in anti-Korean hate speech online, which speech has led in turn to street protests and marches. Makoto Sakurai, the founder of *Zaitokukai*, a citizens' group established in 2007 that opposes what it describes as "special rights" afforded by the Japanese government to *Zainichi* Koreans⁵, gained popularity in the early 2000s through his active online presence (Itagaki, 2015, p. 58). Contributing to their spread, the group's anti-Korean diatribes and marches were video-

⁵ The term *Zainichi* Koreans refers to resident Koreans whose ancestors were forcefully relocated to Japan during Japanese colonization of the country in the first half of the 20th century.

recorded and uploaded on its YouTube channel for viewing by those interested in its beliefs and activities (Hall, 2018).

While the anti-Korean sentiment of the 2000s was widely seen as the product of the online subculture of a handful of extremists⁶, it emerged in the following decade as a serious social issue offline, as alluded to earlier. Specifically, a total of 349 marches in which anti-Korean hate speech was uttered occurred in Tokyo, specifically around the Korean Embassy and in the Shin-Okubo District (also known for Koreatown), over the period from 2011 to July 2014 (Yoon, 2014). When these anti-Korean marches were at their peak in 2013-2014, protestors gathered regularly in Koreatown to brandish racist placards and shout insults at Koreans. Many Korean stores and businesses in Koreatown suffered a significant loss in business as a result of these racist activities during this time, with more than 100 of them—of 500 or so that were operating in the area when it was thriving—going out of business (Ji, 2017). More broadly in Japan, hate speech has even become increasingly intense and pervasive; thus, it was reported that a total of 1,152 hate speech demonstrations (targeting not only Koreans but also other groups of immigrants and foreigners in general) occurred over the period from April 2012 to September 2015 (Ministry of Justice, 2016). In response, Japan's National Diet passed an anti-hate speech bill in 2016. These developments demonstrate that, though the number of Japanese individuals actually participating in anti-Korean hate speech marches may be relatively small, the societal impact of these actions is immense, for a larger group of Japanese anonymously watch and “like” content associated with anti-Korean protests and silently support such protests even if they do not attend them.

Notably, anti-Korean sentiment has, in some cases, been expressed in the form of protests against the Korean Wave. In 2011, for instance, more than 6,000 people gathered at the headquarters of Fuji TV in what came to be known as the “Fuji TV demonstration” or “Odaiba march” to express their deep-seated discontent with the broadcaster for airing what they considered to be too many Korean dramas (Park, 2014). Joining in this opposition to the Korean Wave, right-wing organizations and conservative politicians voiced anti-Korean sentiments publicly, and indeed many of the Korean dramas being shown on Japanese TV networks were canceled around that time (H. S. Kim, 2016, p. 420). With the growth in anti-Korean sentiment in the 2010s, the Korean Wave disappeared from mainstream broadcast media in Japan, though this has not meant that Korean popular culture no longer has a place in Japan's public arena. New K-pop stars and cultural content continue to be discovered and enjoyed by Japanese fans, but online through social media. It is, accordingly, in this context that we investigate here the evolution of the complex dynamics of Japanese fans' understanding of the Korean Wave in relation to the growing Japanese anti-Korean sentiment.

Research thus far on Japanese fans of the Korean Wave has largely focused on the transnational circulation and consumption of popular culture and the impact of the fans' cultural

⁶ A few studies have examined the social production of this hate speech by such extremists – sometimes referred to as “net right-wingers” – including the members of *Zaitokukai*. The investigative journalist Yasuda (2012) characterized the net right-wingers who actively participated in anti-Korean marches as economically desperate, socially isolated, and plagued by deep-seated frustration and sense of injustice. Higuchi (2016), on the other hand, a sociologist, argued that these extremists are not necessarily the social outcasts described by Yasuda but rather more diverse in terms of age, gender, and educational background, thereby complicating the journalist's rather simplistic and impressionistic approach to Japan's far-right.

practice of consuming Korean popular culture on their perceptions of Korea and Koreans from the perspective of soft power amid the uneasy national relations between Japan and Korea (Hanaki, Shinghal, Han, Kim & Chitnis, 2007; Mori, 2008; Harita, 2008; Lee & Ju, 2010). These studies have rightly drawn attention to the manner in which Japanese fans' passionate engagement with Korean popular culture generates a (new) cultural imagination of "transnational East Asia" that transcends the nationalist, territory-bound approach to relations between the two countries. Relatively little research has been done, however, on the fans' perceptions of and engagement with the rise of anti-Korean movements in Japan (an exception being H. Lee, 2017). As Yamanaka (2010) astutely argues, "merely telling of the consumption and production of Korean popular culture did not complete the *hallyu* narrative." Hence, while recognizing the significance of passionate fans' cultural politics but shifting the focus to their attitudes regarding anti-Koreanism, we examine in this paper how young Japanese female fans have intervened in the Korean Wave discourse and responded to the growing anti-Korean sentiment while enjoying Korean popular culture. Such an approach allows for a deep consideration of the relationship between culture and politics as well as of Korea's projection of soft power during the latest Korean Wave.

3. Methods

Employing a qualitative approach, we relied on in-depth interviews with 15 fans of the Korean Wave as our primary source of data for this study. Utilizing both researchers' personal networks, we established three contact persons for our effort to recruit interviewees. We carefully selected these three contact persons in order to diversify the interview participant pool. They were 1) a teacher at a private Korean language school in Tokyo, 2) a translator of Korean novels into Japanese and influential Twitter user who has regularly posted information on Korean popular culture in Japanese on her account, and 3) a graduate student at a prestigious university in Tokyo. Beginning with these individuals and using a snowball sampling method, we recruited and interviewed a total of 15 individuals who met the criteria of being passionate female fans of the Korean Wave living mainly in Tokyo.

We deliberately chose fans in their 20s ($n=7$) and 30s ($n=8$) both because these groups consume the bulk of Korean Wave cultural products in Japan and because of their aforementioned distinction from the older fans of the previous Korean Waves, as discussed further below. While the in-depth interviews constituted the primary data set for this research, we took into account as well the results of surveys, articles in mainstream newspapers, and scholarly writings on incidents that have significantly impacted public perceptions of Korean culture and on the socio-historical context of Korean-Japanese relations so as to support our analysis.

In order to situate our research findings more precisely, we draw attention to characteristics shared by the interviewees for this study (see further the Table 1). First of all, while we did not intentionally recruit women, all of the interviewees ended up being female. The makeup of our sample in this regard reflects the gendered nature of the consumption of the Korean Wave in Japan: the fans have continued to be predominantly female (Hayashi & Lee, 2007; H. Lee, 2010; Mori, 2008). Second, our informants, as self-identified passionate fans and consumers of Korean popular media and culture, had all learned or were learning the Korean language, thereby demonstrating their passion to understand what they are consuming. Participants E and F, for instance, read Korean news on Naver, one of the largest Korean online portals. In addition, all had traveled to

Korea several times for such reasons as sightseeing, attending concerts by their favorite artists, and studying abroad, again demonstrating their love for Korea and its popular culture through their consumer power. Third, most were avid K-pop fans (though Participants E, I, and K identified drama and film as their favorite forms of Korean culture). Most had begun to follow Korean media and popular culture in earnest around 2010 or 2011 (see Table 1), exactly the time when the boom of the Second Korean Wave was being initiated by (mainly) K-pop bands. Following the periodization of the Korean Wave in Japan discussed above, all of our interviewees had fallen under the spell of the New, and specifically Second, Korean Wave.

The interviews each lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes; all were conducted between October 2017 and February 2018. We used semi-structured questionnaires that focused on the interviewees' experiences with and consumption of Korean media and popular culture and elicited their personal opinions about anti-Korean hate speech and demonstrations in Japan in recent years. Each interviewee was compensated with a small monetary reward for her participation in the study. All of the interviews were conducted in Japanese; the interviews were first transcribed in that language and later translated into English for analysis.

Table 1

Profile of Interview Participants

Participant	Year born	Occupation	Year in which fandom began	Preferred K-content
A	1991	Office worker (construction firm)	2011	K-pop
B	1991	Office worker (securities firm)	2011	K-pop
C	1996	Undergraduate student	2011-2012	K-pop, beauty, fashion
D	1980	Office worker (pharmaceutical firm)	2011	K-pop, drama
E	1986	Office worker (unspecified firm)	2011	Drama
F	1997	Undergraduate student	2010	K-pop
G	1984	Office worker (finance firm)	2010	K-pop
H	1985	Office worker (IT firm)	2008	Drama, film, K-pop
I	1995	Graduate student	Since a child	Drama
J	1994	Office worker (airline)	2013	K-pop, drama, beauty
K	1989	Office worker (publishing firm)	2010	Drama, film, travel
L	1993	Undergraduate student	2011-2012	K-pop, drama, travel, beauty
M	1982	Housewife	2010	Drama ⁷ , music, K-pop, travel
N	1983	Office worker (finance firm)	2011-2012	K-pop, travel
O	1983	Office worker (apparel firm)	2012	K-pop

⁷ Notably, this interviewee said that she had watched a total of 51 different dramas in 2017 alone.

4. Fandom and Redefining the Korean Waves

In navigating their relationship to the Korean Wave, Japanese fans have been simultaneously redefining its boundaries. For while the scheme of succeeding Korean Waves in Japan discussed provides a useful analytical framework for assessing the evolution of the phenomenon, the boundaries of the various waves are of course not hard and fast but rather a convenient way of thinking about Korean influence in Japan. We argue that Japanese fans' engagement with the popular Korean Wave discourse reflects the manner in which the fans negotiate their fandom and frame it in a climate that is hostile toward Korea. It is also in this respect that our discussion explores fans' navigation of the discursive space of the Korean Wave and their location of themselves within it.

Our interviewees associated the term "Korean Wave" strongly with the drama fans of the First Korean Wave. This association is consistent with the fact that tabloid weeklies targeting middle-aged women were for the most part responsible for cementing the popularity of *Winter Sonata* in Japan. Repeated reports of the activities of the drama's fans stereotyped them as a "hysterical, uncontrollable crowd of middle-aged women" (Hayashi & Lee, 2007, p. 203). In particular, the terms like *obatarian* or *obarian*, a compound combining *obasan* ("ma'am") and the English word "alien," have served as a derogatory expression for women of this age group and commonly been used by the Japanese mainstream media to describe female fandom relating to *Winter Sonata* (Hayashi & Lee, 2007; H. Lee, 2017). This misogynistic discourse about middle-aged female fans shows clearly the policing of female desire in a highly patriarchal society through the framing and othering of these fans' cultural consumption as irrational, gossip-seeking, pathetic, and even unpatriotic. Countering this depiction in the mainstream Japanese media, some empirical studies have demonstrated that these middle-aged female fans' engagement with and reading of the drama actually generated meaningful intervention and insights into the complexities of Japan-Korea relations (see H. Lee, 2010; Mori, 2008). Nevertheless, fans were still clearly fighting back against the stigma associated with Korean Wave fandom, as the following extracts from the interviews indicate:

Interviewer: Do you consider yourself a Korean Wave fan?

K: I don't like the word *hallyu* [spoken in Korean]; I do like Korean actors, though.

Interviewer: What is the image that the term "Korean Wave" suggests to you?

K: I don't really like it [the term] because it creates a particular image of fans who are screaming at Korean Wave stars at the airport.

Interviewer: Would you then consider yourself a drama fan rather than a Korean Wave fan?

K: Yes, that is correct.

C: At least to me, the so-called Korean Wave has a strong association with drama. Like *Yonsama*?⁸ And I think the target consumer [of the Korean Wave] is different [from what it was in the past].

Interviewer: Do you consider yourself a Korean Wave fan?

⁸ The term *Yonsama*, a combination of the middle name of Yong-joon Bae, the male leading actor of *Winter Sonata*, and the Japanese word *sama* (prince), shows the immense respect that Japanese fans have for him.

J: No, I don't think so [giggling].

Interviewer: Why not?

J: I like CNBLUE. I think that the image of the Korean Wave is too associated with actors in dramas or TVXQ. [People who are] a little older, I guess? Would it be too harsh if I said that they are of an older generation? But I think of members of the older generation when I think of the image of the Korean Wave.

I: I feel like it [the term Korean Wave] was used in the past. Now I don't know... I don't think people are specifically using the term "Korean Wave." Instead, people say "I like Korea" [*kankokuzuki*], including make-up and so on.

From the perspective of these interviewees, then, the meaning of the Korean Wave has become contested as younger fans have sought to dissociate themselves from the perceived negative connotations of being a Korean Wave fan. Especially, Participants K and C associated the term with stereotypical, gendered images of middle-aged drama fans. Indeed, Participant K, as a drama fan, consciously distanced herself from the "older fans." This distancing of themselves from the middle-aged *Winter Sonata* fans, however, should not be seen as an indication that these young fans blindly accept the misogynistic discourse about middle-aged fans. Rather, we argue, these young fans appear to be keenly aware of the negative popular discourse regarding the female fans of earlier Korean Wave dramas constructed by the patriarchal mainstream media and reluctant to go to the effort of engaging with it. More importantly, as we discuss presently, these young fans enjoy Korean popular culture differently from the older fans, particularly those of *Winter Sonata*, thereby distancing themselves from them.

Our interviewees also questioned and challenged the boundaries of the Korean Wave. Participant I for her part insisted that the term was outdated and too narrow to capture the broad reach of Korean culture in contemporary Japan. Taking this reasoning one step further, Participant J rejected the label of Korean Wave fan entirely, identifying instead as a fan of a particular artist (specifically, the K-pop group CNBLUE)⁹. Participant N, as the most knowledgeable of the participants regarding Korean popular culture in general, introduced herself as an *otaku* (roughly, "nerd" or "geek") of Korean pop culture rather than as a Korean Wave fan. Our informants, then, took up various positions within the space created by Korean Wave discourse, in the process influencing and reconstructing the meaning of Korean Wave fandom.

As the Korean Wave gains popularity around the globe and fans' interaction with Korean popular culture becomes increasingly interactive, immersive, and immediate thanks to digital media, it evolves, and its boundaries expand. To be more specific, while K-pop and celebrity culture continue to drive the Korean Wave today, the phenomenon has in recent years come to include fashion, beauty, and food. As a consequence, in the Third Korean Wave, fans do not simply consume media or cultural content (e.g., music, drama, or even tourism) as fans did in the past but rather "Korean style" more broadly. Since fashion, beauty, and food are primarily visual topics

⁹ Her stance in this regard was understandable given CNBLUE's unique position in the Korean Wave in Japan. The great success of the drama *You're So Handsome* (SBS, 2009), which featured the group's leader, Yong-hwa Jung, drew many young fans to Korean dramas and functioned as a bridge to the Second Korean Wave. Because CNBLUE also sang on the drama soundtrack, many of his fans took an interest in K-pop more broadly, in part fueling the Second Korean Wave, which, as noted, emerged in 2010.

optimized for social media, these topics have been at the core of the recent Korean Wave. Not surprisingly, all of the participants in this study actively used such social media platforms as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook to gather and share information about Korean stars, dramas, fashion, and cosmetic brands almost instantly. These young fans also used such Korean produced mobile applications as K-style, Snow, Line, and Naver to search for and share information and to entertain themselves. This behavior is what differentiates them most from the middle-aged fans. These young Japanese fans, who largely consume Korean popular cultural content through SNSs and YouTube, are not content with merely watching TV dramas or going to the concerts and fan meetings. It is this fan-driven, real-time experience and consumption of Korean popular culture that drive the new Korean Wave. Participant C observed that

I think Korean beauty culture has had a huge impact on the [Japanese] youth. As you can see on Twitter, there's a tagline, for example, "#Retweet if you want to be friends with a Korean." So, if you're looking for a friend[ship] on Twitter, you will see a lot of similar taglines, such as "#Retweet if you want to be Korean" or "#Retweet if you look Korean." Or, if you look at LINE profiles, there are people who write, "I am a Korean-Japanese *hafu*" on their profile. People really want to be seen as beauties [*oruchan*], so they put on make-up in a particular way, I mean in a K-pop idol style, and those people have tons of followers on Twitter, and their postings are retweeted a lot.

Echoing Participant C, many of the other interviewees asserted that the "Korean look" or "Korean style" was widely perceived as sophisticated and cool among young women. Koreanness, or a Korean look and style, has become desirable for such fans even in their daily lives. This perspective represents a dramatic shift from earlier Japanese engagement with Korean culture in the sense that K-pop—both the musical genre and its stars' fashions—was generally seen as "inurbane" (to use Participant O's term) among young Japanese audiences as recently as 2005. As a result of this shift, K-pop, as a music genre, has been legitimized in Japan. Thus, the first K-pop artists were largely considered as part of the already extant J(apanese)-pop phenomenon because they sang their songs in Japanese and for Japanese audiences. As Iwabuchi (2008) puts it, "Koreanness is not something that can be comfortably consumed as a mass exotic commodity in the Japanese public imaginary unless its origin is suppressed or 'Japanized,' as is often the case with celebrities who willingly or unwillingly conceal their ethnic descent in public" (p. 254). The K-pop groups associated with the Third Korean Wave, however, have been perceived as creators of a musical genre that is distinct from J-pop (Lie, 2014). The Koreanness expressed by Third Wave K-pop groups has thus acquired significant cultural capital among the Japanese youth, being associated with beauty or other aesthetic criteria. It is in this respect that Japanese fans' engagement with Korean Wave discourse has challenged and expanded its boundaries. When Japanese fans enjoy the cultural products of the Korean Wave, they are not simply buying or consuming Korean content but are making a broader gesture of emulating a particularly Korean approach to fashion, make-up, and even dining.

5. Engaging with Anti-Korean Sentiment (or Not): Politics vs. Entertainment

There remains to be addressed the manner in which Japanese who passionately and self reflexively consume Korean popular culture have understood and reacted to the rise of anti-Korean sentiments and activism. We consider this issue in the following discussion, including the relationship

between (geo)politics and cultural consumption. Our interviewees acknowledged that Japanese anxiety over Korea's influence in the realm of popular culture was associated with the latter's growing regional and global economic power. However, many of them saw no connection between the increasing popularity of the Korean Wave and the rise of anti-Korean hate speech. Thus Participant E said:

I don't think Korean Wave caused or accelerated the rise of anti-Korean sentiment in Japan. I think there exist people who hate Korea in the first place. And it seems certain that there are more opportunities for them [i.e., Koreans] to be singled out recently, too. I think that there are people out there who dislike South Korea and North Korea, and it seems to me that they are just picking up the moment of a massive influx of Korean popular culture just to talk more about their feelings of disgust and hate.

Participant E's point is valid. Though the Fuji TV protest was commonly referred to as an "anti-Korean Wave demonstration" in the mainstream media in both Japan and Korea, according to Iwabuchi (2018), the unrest had not been motivated by any "sense of threat by foreign cultural invasion" but rather by a "sense of antipathy against the flux of media culture that is produced by a country, which demonstrators believe makes an unreasonably offensive attitude to Japan" (p. 192). In other words, the anti-Korean groups had exploited the popularity of the Korean Wave as a means to attract attention while, in reality, they were simply denouncing Korea and Koreans rather than critiquing Korean popular culture specifically.

We emphasize here that most of our interviewees were, in fact, largely indifferent to the issue of hate speech and anti-Korean Wave protest and sentiment. Participant G, for instance, speaking of an encounter with a group spouting hate speech in the Shin-Okubo District of Tokyo, observed that "It [the protest at which marchers had used hate speech] has really nothing to do with me, you know, especially these people who do things like that. It's all same in Korea too, isn't it? There are people who protest against Korea in Japan and people who don't. And I'm one who doesn't." Along the same lines, Participant M recalled seeing the news about the Fuji TV demonstration in 2011:

M: I've seen it on the news. But I'm neither positive nor negative about it. I just thought, "Well, that's what they are doing." Hmm, how should I put it? I personally think it [my stance at the time] was almost close to indifference. It's less about how I think about their act of performing an anti-Korean protest. It's more like me thinking, "Oh, there exists that kind of people, too"

Interviewer: Are you saying that you are neutral?

M: Well, my point is that it's up to individuals regarding how they think about the issue [of hate speech]. Even if I say "I love Korea so much" to them, they won't change their minds. It's none of their business at all. It's not my business [what they think], either.

Interviewer: Is it more like being a bystander, then?

M: Yes, it is. I don't even feel ashamed about [other] Japanese people doing such a thing [using hate speech at marches]. They have their own way of thinking, and I have my own, too.

The sentiment expressed by Participants G and M, that anti-Korean hate speech had nothing to do with them personally, was, again, shared by other informants in our study. Their indifference to the hate speech issue appeared to be one aspect of a strong general tendency to dissociate politics from entertainment. Thus, when we asked whether anti-Korean hate speech and increasing hostility toward Korea and Koreans had affected their consumption of Korean popular culture, most of the participants in our study (13 of 15) said that it had had no impact at all, not even in the context of the increasing political tension between two countries in recent years. Participants E's and L's statements in this regard were illustrative of the dominant view:

E: Historical and political issues have no impact at all on my consumption of Korean Wave content. Not at all. I consider political issues and cultural issues to be completely separate. So there's no impact on them and vice versa.

Interviewer: Why do you consider them separate?

E: It's just a matter between one country and another. Even if the relationship between the two countries has gotten worse, whether I enjoy Korean culture or watch Korean drama does not make any difference as a result. That's why I don't think that they [political and cultural issues] are related.

L: Territorial disputes or historical issues do not affect my consumption of the Korean Wave at all.

Interviewer: Why is that so?

L: They are political issues. It makes no difference if I say this or that because I am just an ordinary person. I feel like, "I'll just leave it [politics] to the politicians." [Laughs]. I don't know; it is of little interest [for me] for sure, if not a matter of indifference. So, I think that we can leave it up to the politicians.

Interviewer: Haven't you ever disliked Korean stars? For instance, what if your favorite idols came to Japan wearing a bangle that supported the comfort women issue?

L: This may sound strange, but Koreans are very patriotic. I feel that Koreans have a very strong sense of how precious their country is. So I think that it [wearing a comfort women support bangle] can't be helped. By contrast, the Japanese don't have that kind of strong [patriotic] feeling, when I think about the people around me. I am not saying that all Japanese lack that kind of patriotic feeling. I'm sure that there are some people who have that. However, I don't think there are many people acting like "We will protect Japan!" People generally don't care that much [about the country].

These statements are consistent with the results of a survey of 100 Korean Wave fans by the Japanese women's magazine *Josei Seven* immediately following President Lee Myung-bak's 2012 visit to Dokdo/Takeshima, an islet claimed by both Korea and Japan, that marked one of the low points in the relationship between the two countries in recent years. When asked about being Korean Wave fans in the midst of the increasing hostility toward Korea and Koreans in Japan, nearly three-quarters of the respondents (71) to the survey agreed with the statement that "politics and entertainment are separate, so I won't stop being a fan" (Tsujimoto, Sakurada, Toita, & Murata, 2012, p. 53). Interestingly, age appears to have been an important variable with respect to the respondents' tendency to dissociate politics from entertainment, with nearly half (47)—and more than half of those aged over 50—agreeing with the statement regarding the Dokdo/Takeshima issue and specifically President Lee's visit that "I wouldn't forgive Korea," and a fifth of them

(20), most of whom were in their 20s and 30s, agreeing with the statement that “I am not interested in the subject” (Tsujiimoto et al., 2012, p. 52). Thus younger fans had a stronger tendency to dissociate politics from entertainment than older fans; and indeed political indifference has been identified as a general characteristic of the current generation of Japanese youth (Ichimura, 2012; Sawada, 2016). According to Ichimura (2012), the general indifference of young Japanese to politics, as evidenced by a dramatic drop in the voting rate of this demographic group, is a product of their distrust of the Japanese political system and politicians and overall sense of helplessness. Further, those who are interested in political issues are often reluctant to discuss them openly (Sawada, 2016). So also our interviewees D and F stated that

D: I haven't really talked to my friends or fellow Korean Wave fans about political issues such as the territorial dispute because we consider it [Korean popular culture] to be separate from politics. We don't really talk about that issue [politics] with each other.

F: In my generation, young Japanese people, including myself, probably don't talk about politics or discuss things like that at school or in their daily lives. So, there's almost no chance to have such a conversation [on politics].

While our informants largely shared this generational characteristic of political indifference, their attitude in this respect is insufficient to explain the younger fans' strong inclination to keep politics and entertainment separate. Given that they are for the most part devotees of K-pop, it is important to understand how the genre is positioned within the broader Japanese music scene. First of all, it should be noted that the consumption of J-pop has long been seen as a form of “pure entertainment,” a hobby separate from politics (Takeshita, 2018). That is, the enjoyment of J-pop music and its stars offers a safe and worry-free space for fans apart from external matters. While the J-pop industry has long enjoyed a solid domestic fanbase, it has suffered several recent setbacks, both external and internal. Thus, on the one hand, some of the leading J-pop bands have broken up (e.g., SMAP) or gone on hiatus (e.g., Arashi) and others (e.g., AKB48) have faced harsh criticism for what has been seen as excessive commercialization (see Galbraith & Karlin, 2012; J. S. Lee, 2018). On the other hand, international competitors such as K-pop have been shaking up the pop-culture marketplace once dominated by J-pop.

K-pop competes with J-pop in part by offering a different way of consuming music. For whereas the Japanese music industry operates essentially within a copyright economy, K-pop is produced and consumed largely through what has been called a “free-sharable economy” (J. S. Lee, 2018); thus, music promotion companies upload official music videos on YouTube, and K-pop artists occasionally release songs for free. In addition, whereas part of the appeal of J-pop stars has been their amateurism, K-pop idols are carefully managed, being trained to make their performances, in particular their choreography, perfect, and their fashions are also carefully managed (Bae, 2016). This distinction is an important aspect of the context of our interviewees' desire to “leave politics to politicians” (in the words of Participant L quoted above) when it comes to popular culture. It is, then, understandable that Participant B preferred that her favorite K-pop idols not even mention historical events.

What is perhaps more intriguing here is the observation that the image that had been put forward in the mainstream media of passionate young fans of the Korean Wave (again, mainly female) being unpatriotic or apolitical has been almost entirely absent from the Japanese national television networks in recent years, especially since the Fuji TV demonstration in 2011. Thus, as alluded to above, as anti-Korean hate groups have gained power online and off, Japanese national TV networks that broadcast Korean dramas or programs that depict Korea or the Korean Wave in a positive light have become targets for anti-Korean groups, the ultimate result being a kind of unofficial “freeze” on Korean Wave content in the Japanese mass broadcasting media that has been in effect since 2012 as the various outlets have sought to avoid the wrath of anti-Korean groups. Nevertheless, as observed earlier, young fans, who rely on social media much more than traditional channels to access content, have continued to enjoy the cultural products of the Korean Wave.

One outcome of this situation is the marked difference in the perception and treatment of the Korean Wave by the traditional mass broadcasting media as opposed to the new social media. This disconnect between the paucity of Korean programming and media coverage of the Korean Wave in Japanese mass media on the one hand and the voracious consumption of Korean popular culture by passionate young Japanese fans on social media on the other has further increased the fans’ tendency to separate politics from entertainment. To be more precise, this elimination of the Korean Wave from the conventional media space has further driven the youth from this space and from politics. Traditionally, the mass media, including national broadcasting networks and daily newspapers, have served as the primary sources of information regarding politics, so, as young people invest less and less time consuming conventional media and more time on social media (Saito, 2020), their interest in politics continues to wane (Sawada, 2016). At the same time, however, it could also be argued that the fans use the popular rhetoric characterizing them as apolitical strategically, as a justification for their refusal to view Korean popular culture in political terms. Put differently, the Japanese fans may be enjoying K-pop and freely expressing their love for the Korean Wave generally online in order to escape the political controversy associated with the Japanese broadcasting media’s airing of Korean content and a sense of guilt for not being sufficiently patriotic.

6. Discussion and Conclusions: The Korean Wave Fans and Geopolitics in East Asia

In this paper, we have explored how Japanese female fans of the Korean Wave have positioned themselves within the mainstream discourse regarding the phenomenon and how they have engaged with—or, rather, declined to engage with—anti-Korean sentiment and activism in their home country. We have argued that the fans have challenged this discourse while at the same time expanding its scope to include the consumption of food, cosmetics, and mobile phone apps. Our research also indicates that, while these fans of Korean popular culture tend to be aware of the growing anti-Korean sentiment in Japanese society, they also tend to separate their consumption of media culture from politics. We further suggest that these tendencies should be understood within the broader context of the perception and positioning of K-pop within Japanese society generally.

The findings presented here offer important insights into the role of Korean Wave cultural products and fans’ dynamics with the (anti-)Korean Wave discourse in Japanese society in the era

of digitally mediated hate politics. To begin with, while it is true that the Korean Wave has, beginning with *Winter Sonata*, enhanced perceptions of Korea globally in ways that traditional diplomacy could not, the limits of this form of soft power are evident in the recent rise of anti-Korean groups in Japan and in the increasing geopolitical tension between the two nations. Thus, on the one hand, the soft power of the Korean Wave has always been constrained by the hard power exercised in the evolving Japanese-Korean political relationship. On the other hand, our research suggests that Japanese female fans of the Korean Wave dissociate politics from cultural consumption. Their doing so, however, should not be simply regarded as indifference to politics, for there is the danger of reinforcing the gender stereotype that women and girls are traditionally less interested in politics or apolitical. Rather, those fans' disengagement needs to be understood as one strategy that they, as fans of Korean popular culture, can adopt while facing increasing political tension between Japan and Korea as well as anti-Korean sentiment both online and offline. Furthermore, it needs to be emphasized that these female fans are very well aware of the historically constructed (cultural) stigma of being Korean Wave fans; therefore, the female fans in their 20s and 30s strategically distance themselves from older fans and try to avoid any possible conflicts or discomfort that they may face as fans.

We have also argued that the tension between old and new media has been a crucial factor in the disposition of Korean Wave discourse in Japan. As has been seen, mainstream networks that air Korean Wave content have faced harsh criticism from right-wing anti-Korean groups. The primary targets have been such traditional networks as NHK, Fuji TV, and Asahi TV. The programs associated with the cultural products of the Korean Wave disappeared from the national broadcasting networks, the result being that Japanese who consume most of their news through traditional media rarely hear about the Korean Wave in Japan but instead view the relationship between their country and Korea from the perspective of a history of hostility, including the Dokdo/Takeshima issue. Hence, while consumption of the cultural products of the New Korean Wave has been propelled by the use of digital and especially social media, we in this paper call attention to the importance of the interaction between old and new media for shaping the discussion of both the Korean Wave and anti-Korean sentiment in Japan.

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