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Forced Invisibility to Negotiating Visibility: *Winter Sonata*, the *Hanryu* Phenomenon and *Zainichi* Koreans in Japan¹

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Abstract

The present article analyzes the impact of *Winter Sonata* (a South Korean television series) and *hanryu* phenomenon -- the current fad for pro-South Korean popular culture -- on Korean residents in Japan (referred to as “*Zainichi* Koreans”). Considering *Zainichi* Koreans as a unique audience set for *Winter Sonata* and *hanryu* culture, the study offers an interpretive analysis of the qualitative data collected from *Zainichi* Korean viewers of *Winter Sonata*. Our study reveals that consumption of *hanryu* and *Winter Sonata* shifts the position of *Zainichi* Koreans from being *invisible* minorities to *visible* ones.

When Bae Yong-Jun, the male protagonist in *Winter Sonata*, a South Korean television series, arrived at Japan’s Narita Airport in 2004, some 3,500 middle-aged Japanese women thronged the sidewalks to welcome him. Some 350 riot police were employed for crowd control. When Bae alighted, the pushing and shoving injured several dozen women, of which ten were transported to local hospitals for fractures, bruises, and sprains (Onishi, 2004, December 16). Bae Yong-Jun, known as “Yon-sama” in Japan, is a living icon of Korean popular culture in Japan.

Winter Sonata, the 2002 Korean television series starring Bae, is considered to be a starting point of the *hanryu* (literally “Korean wave”) phenomenon, referring to the fad for “all things South Korean” – movies, music, on-line games, hip-hop clothes, hairstyles, and cosmetics (Endo & Matsumoto, 2004, December 5; Demick,

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2005, November 2; Dator & Seo, 2004; Ji, 2005). *Hanryu* has not just taken Japan by storm, but has also engulfed other Asian countries such as China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Mongolia, Thailand, and Hong Kong. *Winter Sonata*'s popularity in Japan and the *hanryu* phenomenon have increased trade between the two countries² and promoted people-exchanges. *Winter Sonata* fuelled the interest of Japanese citizens to learn more about South Korea. Many Japanese enrolled in Korean language courses, and thousands traveled to South Korea to sites where *Winter Sonata* was filmed (Onishi, 2005, June 28; Onishi, 2006, January 2).

While *Winter Sonata* was especially popular among middle-aged Japanese women, the *hanryu* wave cut a broader swath across socio-demographic groups, including men and woman of all ages, and notably teenagers (Dator & Seo, 2004, Wiseman, 2004, December 10). Two years before the airing of *Winter Sonata* in Japan, Korean pop singers started to gain popularity in Japan. Today, *hanryu* consumers in Japan include fans of Korean soap operas such as *Winter Sonata*, aficionados of other Korean products like popular music, food, clothing, and cosmetics. Among those audiences of Korean popular culture, rather invisible yet certainly massive consumers are *Zainichi* Korean residents in Japan, people who share cultural roots with native Koreans yet are physically detached from their native land.

There are approximately 700,000 Korean residents in Japan (referred to as *Zainichi* Koreans). Most of the *Zainichi* Koreans are descendents of those who were forcibly moved to Japan from the Korean peninsula as slave labor during the Japanese occupation from 1910 to 1945. The position of *Zainichi* Koreans is not consistent in Japanese political discourses. Sometimes they are identified as "liberated" Korean citizens; other times they are treated as a "cultural minority."

While the history of *Zainichi* Koreans has been discussed by scholars in different disciplines, few stories have been told from *their point of view*. The purpose of the present article is to contribute to the unpacking of cultural identities of *Zainichi* Korean residents in Japan through their narratives and interpretations of experiencing *Winter Sonata* and the *hanryu* phenomenon. Their stories reveal how *Zainichi* Koreans consume popular culture to recognize their own identity, while problematizing the "hidden" histories they have lived through. The rise of *hanryu* has led to more opportunities for *Zainichi* Koreans to recognize their unique positionality in Japan. Their collective memory of the past, including the torturous history of Japanese colonialism in Korea, as also the discrimination they faced in Japan, influences their perspective of *hanryu*, which, to others, may seem like a harmonizing cultural phenomenon.

In the present article, first, a background of *Winter Sonata* is provided, followed by a theoretic framework to understand how audiences' identity and cultural practices mediates their engagement with television serial drama. Then the historical context of *Zainichi* Koreans position in Japanese society is elaborated.

Next, guiding research questions for this study are posed, followed by a description of our method and data-collection procedures. Finally, the study's research results on how the *Zainichi* Koreans consume *Winter Sonata*, and how that shifts their visibility as a cultural minority, are reported and implications discussed.

A Background on *Winter Sonata*

Winter Sonata, a South Korean television drama series, was produced by the Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) and broadcast in South Korea in 2002. Directed by Yoon Seok-ho, a respected South Korean television drama producer-director, *Winter Sonata* was first broadcast in Japan in 2003 on the NHK satellite channel (NHK BS2). Because NHK BS2 requires viewers to purchase special reception devices and pay subscription fees, the numbers of viewers in *Winter Sonata*'s first run were limited. Nevertheless, the broadcast of *Winter Sonata* on NHK BS2 received much acclaim, and reruns followed in on the same channel later in 2003. Goaded by surging audience demand, NHK broadcast *Winter Sonata* on the NHK general channel (with the widest nationwide reach) from April to August 2004. Further, the uncut version of the drama in Korean language with Japanese subtitles was broadcast in late December 2004 on the NHK BS2.

Winter Sonata is a love story between a male character Jun-sang and a female character Yu-jin who fall in love (both for the first time) in high school. However, Jun-sang has to leave for the U.S. for higher education, and prior to his departure they arrange to meet on New Year's Eve. Yu-jin keeps waiting but Jun-sang never appears. The next day, Yu-jin learns that Jun-sang was killed in a road accident on his way to meet her. Yu-jin is devastated for she lost her first love. Fifteen years later, Jun-sang reappears in front of Yu-jin but now his name is Min-hyung. Jun-sang did not recognize Yu-jin because he lost his memory in the road accident. Although Yu-jin believes that Jun-sang is dead, Min-hyung's resemblance to Jun-sang and Yu-jin's memory of her first love leads the two to fall in love. After facing many difficulties, in the last episode, Jun-sang and Yu-jin meet at the house that Jun-sang designed as an architect. By this time, Jun-sang is almost blind. He lost his sight in a second road accident, but the trauma somehow restored his lost memory. In a moving scene, Jun-sang and Yu-jin recognize each other. Their first love is realized all over again.

While this love story looks straightforward, the plot of *Winter Sonata* was quite complicated. Akin to other South Korean dramas, an intricate web of family relationships undergirds the plot, and a sense of mystery sustains the audiences' attention. For instance, Jun-sang transferred to the high school where he meets Yu-jin with the primary intention to find his real father. At a certain moment, the drama encourages the audience to believe that Jun-sang's father and Yu-jin's

father might be the same person and, as a consequence, the two lovers might be siblings. As the story unfolds, the webs of family ties are disentangled, resulting in a sense of mystery that dramatizes the primary story of pure love between the two protagonists.

As noted previously, *Winter Sonata* became extremely popular among Japanese audiences, especially among Japanese middle-aged women. Many of them traveled to South Korea on package tours to visit the filming locations of *Winter Sonata*, enrolled in Korean language classes, and downloaded pictures of Bae Yong-Jun, the handsome protagonist on their cell phone, checked his Japanese language website daily, and could recite with confidence his daily diet and exercise regimen (Wiseman, 2004, December 10; Yoshida, 2004, November 23). However, the influence of *Winter Sonata* on Zainichi Koreans was markedly different, mediated by their cultural identity and a collective memory of past history.

Cultural Identity and Consumption of Serial Drama

A number of scholars have studied the consumption of serial drama as gendered and cultural practice. Previous studies on gendered aspects of television viewership (Fiske, 1986; 1987/2003), textual characteristics of television serials (such as soap operas) (Ang, 1996; Howard, 1997; Rogers, 1991/2003), and cultural identities of soap opera fans (Lee and Cho, 1990/2003; Soruco, 1996) provide a useful frame to understand how Zainichi Koreans may have engaged with *Winter Sonata*.

Television serials, including soap operas, are often referred to as “feminine texts” (Rogers, 1991/2003). The fragmented cultural codes in a soap opera help reinforce the prevailing gendered roles for women characters. As soap operas mainly appeal to women audiences, and thus are created for them, analyzing this media genre provides insights into the complexities of existing cultural codes for women (Shefner-Rogers, Rogers, & Singhal, 1998; Svenkerud, Rahoi, & Singhal, 1995). Not surprisingly, soap operas are designed to appeal to emotions (rather than reasons), which are traditionally associated with the feminine (Fiske, 1987; Nariman, 1993; Singhal & Rogers, 1999). Concomitantly, Brown (1990) argues that linguistic codes within a soap opera further reinforce the gendered aspects of this television genre. As Brown notes (1990: 186): “the openness of narrative form” in soap operas resonates closely with feminine oral culture. As opposed to formal speech making with clear introduction and conclusion, the “infinitely extended middle” in a television series makes redundancy useful and desirable. In essence, television soap operas often serve as important reinforcers of gendered and minority practices, perpetuating existing cultural codes.

John Fiske’s (1987) explanation about the textual characteristics of a television

soap opera is helpful in understanding viewership experiences. Drawing upon Brown's (1987) "generic characteristics of soap opera," Fiske explains that serial dramas are characterized by openness; that is, there does not have to be narrative closure (also see Hall, 1980; Lozano & Singhal, 1993; Olson, 1999). The ending of a serial story does not guarantee the death of the narrative. "Even without physical presence, the departed characters live on in the memory and gossip both of those that remain, and their viewers" (Fiske, 1987: 470). This nature of "infinitely extended middle" in a television series enables viewers to actively participate in reading, interpreting, and reflecting on the ongoing narrative.

At the same time, the viewers' engagement with the narrative is mediated by their cultural and ideological codes (Lindlof & Meyer, 1987). For example, the *Gbagyi* people in Nigeria interpreted *Dallas* very differently from American viewers. Based on their cultural beliefs and ideas, they drew connections between the traits of J. R. Ewing, the central character in *Dallas*, and their traditional myths. So J.R. Ewing was viewed as the trickster worm in Nigerian mythology (Olson, 1999). Similarly, Laotian refugees in the U.S. especially identified with news items that dealt with Ethiopian refugee camps (Conquergood, 1986). The Laotians felt they were "like" the Ethiopian people in the refugee camps. The identifying elements of reality and vividness were drawn from their own personal, lived experiences. Physical distance and dissimilarity in physical appearance were less important to the Laotian refugees than the larger issues (such as displacement, hunger, and poverty) shared by both the Laotian and Ethiopian refugees (Conquergood, 1986; Singhal, Chitnis & Sengupta, 2005).

In essence, theorizing in this realm of media reception studies argues for extending the focus of inquiry beyond "what" the narrative says to analyze "how" the audience members' historical experiences and cultural identity mediates their engagement with the unfolding text. In the following section, we describe the socio-historical context of the *Zainichi* Koreans' lived experiences to better understand their engagement with *Winter Sonata*'s text.

Understanding the *Zainichi* Korean Experience

Zainichi, literally "being in Japan", is a term used for those who share either Korean ethnicity or nationality and reside in Japan. In a globalized world, it may sound "natural" to consider *Zainichi* Koreans as an ethnic minority group who contribute to Japan's multiculturalism and diversity. However, viewing *Zainichi* Koreans just as immigrants or "new citizens" of Japan overlooks an important aspect of their identities and collective memories. Further, the study of *Zainichi* Koreans' position, identity, and collective memory in Japan points to many historical burdens. So to better understand how *hanryu*, the South Korean popular culture wave, affects the *Zainichi* Koreans in Japan, it may be useful to revisit

history.

A majority of *Zainichi* Koreans who reside in Japan are descendents of those Koreans who came to Japan during the Japanese colonial regime. During 36 years of Japanese occupation from 1910 to 1945, over two million Korean people moved to Japan; most were moved by brute force. Majority of them were Southern Koreans, mostly from Kyong-Sang prefecture, Chul-La prefecture, and Chae-Joo Island. When Korea was liberated from Japan's occupation in 1945, there were approximately two million Koreans living in Japan. According to the report from the Japanese Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1,040,328 people returned to South Korea between 1945 and 1950, and only 351 people to North Korea (Kang, 2005). Kang (2005) notes, however, that these may be modest numbers given that some used "other illegal routes, such as chartering ships" (Morita, cited by Kang, 2005). Roughly, it is estimated that about 1,300,000 people came back to Korea after liberation, leaving about 700,000 Koreans in Japan – the "*Zainichi*" Koreans residents.³

Although 700,000 Koreans ended up staying in Japan after the country's liberation, many of them did not "choose" to be *Zainichi* Koreans. A majority of first generation Koreans did not plan to stay in Japan for their entire life, but rather, they were hoping to return home. However, when the Japanese government restricted the amount of money, material goods, and proceeds of properties that the Koreans could repatriate, going home became increasingly difficult. Further, the country's division into North and South Korea, and the ensuing political turmoil, raised anxiety about returning home.

Kennedy and Roudometof (2002) note: "Historically, transnational connections, cultures and communities were the 'natural' state of affairs. This ubiquitous quality was temporally concealed during the relatively recent age of the modernizing nation state" (p.3). The long history of diasporatic existence of *Zainichi* Koreans in Japan can also be viewed from the conflicting definition of "immigrants" in modern era. Koreans were once "included" in Japan (with the negation of their nationality) under the colonial regime, and then "excluded" in Japan under the ideology of the modern nation state. An important aspect for these inclusion and exclusion is that the *Zainichi* Koreans never chose to be "included" or "excluded." In other words, notions of "inclusion" and "exclusion" were defined by the monolithic ideology of the Japanese modern nation state that assumed a homogeneous society. Thus, a history of *Zainichi* Koreans can be viewed in terms of their struggles over "places," both physical and psychological, including what, to them, represents "home." Their history has, in several respects, been decided for them, without them having much say in how it unfolds.

The identity of *Zainichi* Koreans should be considered along the continuum of Japanese colonialism, Korea's liberation and simultaneous division, and the ensuing Korean and Japanese government policies. Unfortunately, the over 60

years (since 1945) of displaced relationship between the *Zainichi* Koreans and the Korean peninsula is also laced with their exclusion from the Japanese public sphere and their attachment to the politics of Korea. As Korean politics after the country's liberation were framed by Cold War politics, the lives of *Zainichi* Koreans in Japan were also influenced by the ideological forces of that era. Many *Zainichi* Koreans grouped themselves into two dominant organizations; one associated with Republic of Korea (South Korea); the other with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea). An organization known as *Min-Dan* identifies themselves as an official supporter of South Korea, while *Chong-Ryun* is viewed as a representative of North Korea⁴. Because of Cold War politics and the ideological divide between North and South Korea, the relationship between *Chong-Ryun* and *Min-Dan* was antagonistic. Given that both the North and South governments did not recognize the other as legitimate, both *Chong-Ryun* and *Min-Dan* denied the legitimacy of the other. Each organization officially mediated the contact of Japanese and *Zainichi* Koreans with their respective governments, further promoting exclusion and insularity.

After the collapse of Communist regimes in Europe beginning in the late 1980, and the changing sphere of world politics, the *Zainichi* Koreans' claim on their national affiliation has undergone shifts. With the economic success of South Korea (ROK) and friendly relationship between Japan and the ROK, more *Zainichi* Koreans have aligned themselves with the ways of South Korea, even if one previously identified with North Korea. Interestingly, however, among *Zainichi* Koreans, nationality (whether affiliated with North or South Korea), educational background, and organizational affiliation do not serve as primary determining factors of their cultural identities; this identity is foremost a function of their having descended from the Korean forced labor who were shipped to Japan during the occupation. So when the South Korean television series *Winter Sonata* was broadcast in Japan, it was consumed not only by Japanese audiences but also by large population of *Zainichi* Koreans *regardless of* their political and national affiliation. The viewership of *Winter Sonata* in Japan can thus be situated within the shifting historical and cultural borders.

Research Questions

Drawing upon our above theoretical and historical contextualization, the following three research questions are posed:

Research Question #1. *How do Zainichi Koreans consume South Korean cultural products such as Winter Sonata?*

Research Question #2. *How do Zainichi Koreans' past experiences relate to, and resonate with, the story of the South Korean television series, Winter Sonata?*

Research Question #3. *How do Zainichi Koreans negotiate their position in Japanese society in the context of the popularity of Winter Sonata and the hanryu phenomenon?*

Method and Data Collection

The present research team, which includes a *Zainichi* Korean, a Japanese national, a South Korean national, and others, collected multiple types of data during 2005. We read over one hundred articles covering *Winter Sonata* and the *hanryu* phenomenon in major newspapers, magazines, and web sites from Japan, South Korea, the U.S., and some other East Asian countries. Two of the authors directly observed the rise of the *hanryu* phenomenon in Japan, and on summer and winter break trips to home conducted in-depth interviews with three Japanese and five *Zainichi* Koreans who had watched *Winter Sonata*. We also conducted an extensive in-depth interview, over several sessions, with one middle-aged Japanese women in the United States, who was an avid fan of *Winter Sonata*. The interviewee collected and filed media clippings about the program, and who went on a tour of South Korea with her friend and the friend's mother, staying in the same suite in the Seoul Plaza Hotel where Bae Yong-jun had stayed, and visiting several sites – such as the Yong Pyong Ski Resort and Choon-cheon – where the television series was shot.

While all of the above data helped in contextualizing our analysis, this paper particularly focuses on presenting the results of an interpretive analysis of qualitative questionnaires collected from 40 *Zainichi* Korean viewers of *Winter Sonata*, and five in-depth interviews conducted with *Zainichi* Korean viewers. Among the 40 respondents to the open-ended questionnaire, 36 were female and four were male viewers. The age of these 40 respondents ranged from 13 to 84 years, including two people in their 10s; five in their 20s; three in their 30s; 13 in their 40s; 15 in their 50s; one in her 70s; and 1 in her 80s. Occupations of the respondents included homemakers, middle school and college students from Korean schools, corporate employee, medical practitioner, nurse, shop owner, part time worker, and others.

The data were collected in two major cities of Japan -- Tokyo and Kobe, in which *Zainichi* Koreans populations are represented in higher numbers. In Kansai region where Kobe is located, Koreans tend to live in close proximity. The data-collection procedure for the *Zainichi* Korean viewers of *Winter Sonata* in Japan was led by one of the present authors who is a *Zainichi* Korean resident and graduated from a Korean school in Japan. The in-depth interviews with five avid viewers of *Winter Sonata* were conducted in Tokyo, Japan in March 2005. Participants consisted of four female and one male viewer(s), whose ages ranged from 28 to 71

years.

The open-ended questionnaire was drafted in the Japanese, which is the primary language of most *Zainichi* Korean residents. The letter attached with each questionnaire asked the respondent to use whichever language (Japanese, Korean, or mixed) that they felt comfortable in. All the questionnaires were returned to the present authors. After one of the authors translated the responses into English, the team asked several trusted bilinguals of Japanese and English to translate the English version back into Japanese and Korean. This process confirmed that the essential meanings of the original Japanese responses were retained in the English translation. One of the authors, a *Zainichi* Korean, conducted the first round of interpretive analysis on the responses, carefully reading the responses many times and identified themes pertaining to each of the research questions. Then, the other authors examined the results of the interpretive analysis, refining the thematic analysis over several interactions.

Based on the observed thematic patterns in our respondents' comments, we categorized the result of data analysis into three sections, organized around our research questions: (1) The purposeful consumption of *Winter Sonata* and other South Korean cultural products among *Zainichi* Koreans (2) a positive personal resonance displayed by *Zainichi* Koreans to the cultural codes imbedded in *Winter Sonata*, and (3) a re-negotiation of their "visibility" as a minority in Japan on account of the increased Japanese recognition of Korean popular culture.

Consumption of South Korean Cultural Products

Research Question #1 asked: *How do Zainichi Koreans consume South Korean cultural products such as Winter Sonata?* The collected data suggest that for the most part our *Zainichi* Korean respondents consumed *Winter Sonata* (and other South Korean television programs that followed) purposefully. As one respondent noted "I watched *Winter Sonta* to be exposed to Korean language," another respondent noted:

The biggest reason that I started to watch KNTV [a cable station that airs South Korean programs] is to learn the Korean language. Once I watched it, I realized that they have so many interesting programs! And also, I could watch it in a serious manner, since it's the language that I wanted to learn.

The above respondent, a third generation *Zainichi* Korean in Japan who had spent time in the U.S., further told us that by making South Korean friends in the U.S., she realized that the spoken languages by South Koreans were different from what she spoke, and this experience motivated her to familiarize herself with the South

Korean linguistic nuances. She added:

As for *Winter Sonata*, several South Korean friends recommended to watch it when I was in the U.S. Everybody said it was excellent and Bae Young-jun was so handsome. But I could not watch it right after I got back home [to Japan]. It was not a big boom at that time. And even at the Korean market, they only had DVDs [of *Winter Sonata*], and I couldn't afford it. But then, I heard that it would be aired [again] through (Japanese) TV, and started to watch it. But my honest feeling was that it's nothing creative or different from those soap dramas that I have been already exposed in KNTV. I didn't find it unique.

This respondent's comment suggests that *Winter Sonata* was only *one* among several Korean soap operas that she watched. In contrast to most Japanese viewers (see Hanaki, Singhal, Han, Kim, & Chitnis, in press) for whom *Winter Sonata* opened a "window" to experience South Korean popular culture, *Zainichi* Koreans seemed to have more specific individualized purposes to watch the program (for instance, in this particular case, to gain more familiarity with the Korean language). This viewpoint corresponds with another 26 year old female respondent's answer who said that she saw *Winter Sonata* along the "continuum of other South Korean soap operas." For *Zainichi* Korean residents, who have been watching South Korean programs, *Winter Sonata* is situated within the context of other Korean popular culture they have been consuming on a daily basis for years.

Such was not the case for Japanese viewers, who rarely consumed Korean television programs prior to the broadcasts of *Winter Sonata*. A few years ago, Bae Yong-jun (the main male character) and Choi Ji-woo (the main female character) were unknown among Japanese audiences. One of our Japanese respondents told us how *Winter Sonata* caught her attention but, importantly, without any prior expectation:

The first time I watched [*Winter Sonata*], I was like, "umm..." [meaning that she did not like it so much], but when I watched the second [episode], I felt kind of compelled to see the next. Then, that led to the third, fourth It compelled me to watch because I wanted to see the next story. ... Then [the feeling] escalated and deepened... I did not know who Bae Young-jun is, nor did I have any knowledge that he was a star in Korea.

The above comment, reflective of a general sentiment among our Japanese respondents, suggests that they did not purposefully choose to watch *Winter Sonata*, given they had little prior experience with Korean programs. Their viewership happened rather accidentally. As the popularity of *Winter Sonata* grew through

buzz-style word-of-mouth (from Zainichi Koreans to their Japanese counterparts), media coverage, and repeated broadcasts, the program found itself on the crest of the *hanryu* tidal wave.

In sum, our data suggests that Japanese viewers and *Zainichi* Korean viewers brought somewhat different motivations and experiences to watch the program. They brought different backgrounds, viewing preferences, language competencies, and purposes to the consumption of *Winter Sonata*.

Personal Resonance with *Winter Sonata*

Research Question #2 asked: *How do Zainichi Koreans' past experiences relate to, and resonate with, the story of the South Korean television series, Winter Sonata?* Several mass media programs display attributes of "cultural shareability," often featuring archetypal characters that are universally appealing across geographic and cultural boundaries (Singhal & Udornpim, 1997; Udornpim & Singhal, 1999). Our *Zainichi* Korean respondents, even though they were brought up in Japan, felt that *Winter Sonata* had many culturally-shareable attributes with their experiences, leading to a sense of attachment to the program. A 53 year old, second generation *Zainichi* Korean woman respondent noted:

You know, in Japan, folks in our generation have grown up with all sorts of discrimination. Especially, in terms of the name issue, we couldn't use our real name in public space, and had to switch our names to Japanese ones.⁵ I just simply couldn't use my real name in public. With that kind of experience, when I saw those names of three characters [in *Winter Sonata*] that are *same* with me, ... when you see those same names on TV, and think that they are the *same* ethnicity and are *our* people, that gave me very special feeling. It gave me the different feeling of attachment. It was like that I can identify myself with that world [represented in the show].

While the above comment does not directly address the story of *Winter Sonata*, it reveals the *absence* of the Japanese popular cultural codes in the program, and the presence of familiar Korean codes. The presence of Korean names in the popular public screen of Japan was a big change, especially given its long time absence. In fact, names are an important indicator of ethnicity in Japan. A number of celebrities in Japan, who had their roots in Korea, converted their names to Japanese ones to get on the screen.

Another *Zainichi* Korean woman who was 47 years old told us how she experienced a sense of personal resonance with the emplotments of *Winter Sonata*:

I liked it [*Winter Sonata*] a lot. In fact, I was asked in a job interview today how I felt about this *hanryu* phenomenon. I answered that I watched the program from a *Korean* perspective. [For Koreans,] family issues, your family, and parents affect your life a lot. But no matter how your life is affected by your family, and no matter how strong you disagree with what your parents do, you end up choosing your parents. This is just a thing that you can't ignore. This kind of feeling is not in Japanese soap operas. And this kind of thing is not that I can talk to somebody about. But in Korean soap operas, and in *Winter Sonata*, this *is* an issue. I had a feeling that this soap is talking *for* myself [a *Zainichi* Korean] to Japanese audiences.

For our *Zainichi* Korean respondents, what attracted them to *Winter Sonata* were shared cultural "facts" and memories, which are "unshareable" with the Japanese people. The issues of culture, revealing their "Koreanness" or different family culture, are "hidden truths" for *Zainichi* Koreans, given the historical discrimination they faced. One of our respondents noted that Korean dramas such as *Winter Sonata* help to voice their cultural truths. She noted, "as a person who always had that kind of *silent feeling*, I cannot but thank this power of Korean media." The cultural truths, which had negative connotative meanings in Japanese society have been transformed by the acceptance of Korean popular culture in Japan. This palpable societal change provides the *Zainichi* Koreans an opportunity to make their "muted" lives and identities more "visible."

Negotiation of Visible Identity

Research Question #3 asked: *How do Zainichi Koreans negotiate their position in Japanese society in the context of the popularity of Winter Sonata and the hanryu phenomenon?* The wide acceptance of Korean popular culture among Japanese audiences raises the "visibility" of *Zainichi* Koreans in Japan's public sphere. In contrast to the past circumstance in which *Zainichi* Koreans were perceived negatively and thus needed to "hide", *Zainichi* Koreans now have to negotiate their *visibility* in the public sphere.

A 29 year old female respondent noted: "An interesting thing is that ... when I introduce myself or start chatting with the Japanese, they always talk about *hanryu* phenomenon, saying, 'I am interested in it.'" This comment is supported by several other *Zainichi* Korean respondents. A female respondent who works as a nurse in a clinic noted: "In my clinic, among Japanese patients, when they recognize that I am Korean by my name, they would say 'it's [*Winter Sonata*] such a phenomenon!' They always talk about this [*hanryu*]." What these comments seemingly suggest is that *Zainichi* Koreans' bodies have now become "tokens" to represent the *hanryu*

culture, allowing for a public identification of their physical bodies and culture. People associate their knowledge of South Korean popular culture with the bodies and beings of *Zainichi* Koreans.

This notion of *visibility* and such acts of *identification*, however, are rather critically observed by some of our respondents. While admitting that "it has become easy [for them] to have conversation [with the Japanese about *hanryu*]," they also confess that this has led to some complexity of identity. The complex feeling they experience in the changing Japanese attitudes toward *Zainichi* Koreans is a function of the separation between South and North Korea, and the lack of historicity that is embedded in prevailing Japanese attitudes. A 60 year old *Zainichi* Korean male respondent observed:

In [a] sense, it [*Winter Sonata*] has brought a lot of benefit for our lives, since people's awareness has changed. It has become easier to live here because of that. That in one sense is a lucky thing for us. ... But what is sad for me at the same time is that these [favorable attitudes] are only for South Korea. That's a sad part of it. ... So, when they think Korean, the only good image comes for South Korea and only bad image goes toward North Korea. They think South and North are completely different countries.

It is important to note that since all the first generation Koreans came to Japan *before* the country's division into North and South, the notion of the separate country for *Zainichi* Koreans has been ambiguous. The cultural memories shaped in the minds of *Zainichi* Koreans' mind and passed on through education is a *unified* Korea. Moreover, as explained previously, given the historical fact that a number of people who actually came from Southern Korea went "back" to North Korea during the 1960s, the notion of "home country" for *Zainichi* Koreans is determined by *both* South *and* North Korea. The accelerated "friendship" between Japan and South Korea and the simultaneous naming of North as an "enemy" state creates a split perception toward *Zainichi* Koreans.

In opposition to the pride and joy that the breakthrough of *Winter Sonata* and *hanryu* phenomenon brings to them, our *Zainichi* Korean respondents struck a cautious tone. As a 26 year old female respondent noted:

I think that the interests that Japanese audience have for the *hanryu* boom is toward 'Korean celebrity culture'. There are many Japanese who do not know why we *Zainichi* Koreans are in Japan. I hope that more Japanese people would learn about Korean history as a result of this *hanryu* boom.

Another 28 old female respondent judged the fascination among Japanese toward Korean pop culture to be a strategic insidious ploy:

You know, if they promote a good image about Korea, it will definitely become a benefit to Japan. Although they have been doing bad things to Korea historically, it was difficult to have people think that they were oppressing Korean people. They did not even have a sense of shame for what they did. So basically there has been no awareness [about the history] of the Korean people. But if more and more people can have a good attitude toward Korea, they can say that Japan and Korea have overcome the “sad” relationship. They can say Korea has become a close country for them, and a friendly mood has been created. This makes it easier to cover up the history. So, I think, this also is a factor why this phenomenon [*hanryu*] lasts long. In some sense, media controls the culture so that it will last longer.

Another *Zainichi* Korean respondent of 53 years old viewed the argument that cultural friendship because of *hanryu* is transforming the relationship between the Japan and Korea as a way of turning a “sad” history into a mere “mistake”:

To be honest these things are just funny.... Well, I admit that *hanryu* made our life here easier, because basically you can’t imagine what kind of discrimination we had to face in our daily life when we were brought up....So, as far as life is concerned, it became easier for us to be Korean. But the flip side of it is that this (*hanryu*) is the only thing Japanese know about Koreans. The beautifully articulated reality only talks about cultural interaction with the message “we have been a close yet a far country, but let’s get together.” And politicians are using these. Well maybe for the Korean side, they have the awareness about the history, but they see the economic benefit out of it.

The absence of awareness about the troubled history among Japanese audience members is worrisome to these *Zainichi* Koreans, since historical pain and sufferings seemingly dissolve in the bowl of cultural friendship. Several other comments made by *Zainichi* Korean respondents supported this rather skeptic tone about the *hanryu* phenomenon, demonstrating their mixed feelings about it. They fear that important historical details are being conveniently glossed over by Japanese audiences. The *Zainichi* Koreans’ complex and mixed feelings toward the Japanese fascination for Korean pop culture occurs from intersections between culture, history, and politics.

Conclusions

The present study analyzed the impact of the highly-popular, trend-setting South Korean television series, *Winter Sonata*, on the *Zainichi* Korean residents

of Japan. A super hit program in Japan, *Winter Sonata* paved the way for what has come to be known as *hanryu*, the craze for South Korean popular culture, celebrities, fashion, and the like. By focusing on the meanings and interpretations of *Zainichi* Koreans toward *Winter Sonata* and *hanryu*, we were able to shed light on how the unpleasant history of Japanese colonialism in Korea, as also the discrimination faced by *Zainichi* Koreans in Japan, mediated their engagement with this popular culture phenomenon.

For Koreans living in Japan, issues of displacement, national identity, and hybridity are both *historical* and *imaginary*, while at the same time *products* and *processes*. These are historical in that *Zainichi* Koreans' presence in Japan are the product of the colonial occupation, which led to a mass movement of population from Korea to Japan. At the same time, meanings of nations and home are *imaginary* to the extent that *Zainichi* Koreans have kept their Korean nationality. While their descendents still identify themselves as displaced Korean citizens, the meanings of citizenship and nationality are being negotiated within daily lived practices. Koreans' displacement as historical events and their long-term residency in Japan have allowed them to live in the borderlands of nation-states, while sometimes being in a position to cross those lines. In this sense, daily practices of *Zainichi* Koreans simultaneously embody both historical and imagined displacement, national identity, and a hybrid self. Yet the change in the social and cultural atmosphere in Japan as a result of *Winter Sonata* and the *hanryu* phenomenon has transformed their *imagined* culture into a *practical* one. *Zainichi* Koreans now actively negotiate the meaning of their language and culture in their daily lived experience, something that previously was more detached and inaccessible.

Our research suggests that *Zainichi* Korean residents in Japan have a different point-of-view than the dominant "ga ga" popular public opinion toward *Winter Sonata* and *hanryu* phenomenon. Our study is a unique attempt to understand how the cultural minority of Japan and displaced citizens of Korean culture consume a cultural product that is from their country. The result of our study may also suggest that forces of culture, politics, and history are interconnected for those people whose bodies and identities are *representative* of, and shaped by, these forces simultaneously.

Except for the existence of institutionalized bodies, such as Korean students in Japan who wear Korean traditional dress as their school uniforms, *Zainichi* Koreans were *invisible* cultural minority in Japanese public sphere. The breakthrough of Korean popular culture in Japan has made them more *visible*, but through this visibility they have to negotiate the stronger dose of "amnesia" among the Japanese about the history of occupation, oppression, and discrimination. While *Winter Sonata* played a key role in transforming the meanings associated with Korean culture in the Japanese society, *Zainichi* Korean residents have to live *with* and

within this transformed reality on a day-to-day basis.

What larger implications does our present study hold for the field of communication? When possible, communication researchers must actively seek to “hear” the voices of the minority for their points-of-view are routinely silenced, overlooked, or rejected. Marginalized and muted discourses should be given an opportunity to rise to the fore to provide alternative readings to dominant discourses. As one of our American colleagues reminded us: “My children would read a different version of modern American history if it were written from the point-of-view of the American Indians; or, for that matter, from the perspective of those who served as slaves.” By giving the *Zainichi* Koreans voice in this study, we were able to create a space for a critical, alternative textual reading of *Winter Sonata* and the *hanryu* phenomenon.

NOTES

1. We thank Soon-Ja Hong, Chul-Hee Kim, Choi Jin, and Yeong-Ja Kim, who helped us in implementing the present research project in Japan. This article is a part of a larger, ongoing research project which looks at the influence of *Winter Sonata* among Japanese, Korean, and *Zainichi* Korean viewers.
2. According to *Nikkei Shinbun*, a Japanese newspaper, the total economic profit for Korea in 2004 was estimated approximately as 1,4339 trillion won (1.19 billion Dollars), which contributed to increasing the national GDP of South Korea by 0.18 % (Suzuki, May 06, 2005).
3. The term “*Zainichi*” Koreans initially meant their “temporal” residency in Japan. Most Koreans shared a strong will to return home, once the situation allowed them to do so. However, as they observed political turmoil characterized by the division of the country, and as they lacked resources to return home, they gradually built their ways to survive in Japan.
4. See Sonya Ryang (1993, 1997, 1998) for a more detailed description of *Chong-Ryun*’s collective identity and ideology. Ryang’s work pays attention to the use of language , as well as other aspects of organizational identity and ideology of *Chong-Ryun* as a self-acclaimed North Korean organization in Japan.
5. During the Japanese colonial period, every Korean was given a Japanese name, and was forced by law to use the Japanese name (called *Sousikaimei*). After the Korean liberation, this law was repealed. However, many *Zainichi* Koreans kept their Japanese names to survive in Japanese society. In many cases, their Japanese names are registered in their legal documents, such as their foreigner registration card.

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