

THE EFFECTS OF TELEVISION VIEWING, CULTURAL PROXIMITY, AND ETHNOCENTRISM ON COUNTRY IMAGE

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We explored the effect of viewing Korean drama miniseries television programs, along with cultural proximity and ethnocentrism, on Japanese and Chinese television watchers' perceptions of Korea. By conducting a survey in Beijing and China with 621 valid samples, we confirmed the effect of viewing Korean drama miniseries television programs in shaping a positive attitude toward Korea. Furthermore, this positive attitude yielded higher levels of behavioral intentions such as visiting Korea or buying Korean products. Cultural proximity was also found to be a significant variable in predicting positive attitudes toward Korea. However, contrary to the findings in previous studies, in this study the effect of ethnocentrism was not significant.

Keywords: television programs, drama miniseries programs, Korean Wave, Hallyu, cultural proximity, ethnocentrism, country image, Japan, China.

The Korean Wave, also known as “Hallyu”, refers to the spread of South Korean cultural productions' content to neighboring countries and beyond (Farrar, 2010). Korean television miniseries have been exported to Japan, China, Taiwan, and Vietnam since the mid 2000s.

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Despite a wealth of extant research on the effect of country of origin on consumers' overall perceptions toward a specific country, few researchers have explored the effects of television viewing on national image in Asian countries (Farrar, 2010; Kim & Richardson, 2003). Although their languages are different, Asian cultures share an "Eastern" mentality characterized by respect for the father and mother, as well as a hierarchical society that adheres to Confucian ethics. As Straubhaar (1997) argued, cultural proximity is important in explaining why viewers embrace or reject television programs such as soap operas. This provides a theoretical framework for examining the extent to which Korean dramas are culturally acceptable to neighboring Asian countries. In contrast with cultural proximity, ethnocentrism may have a negative impact on one country's attitudes toward another (Burch, 2002).

In this study, we explored the relationship between viewing Korean drama miniseries television programs – along with the social forces of cultural proximity and ethnocentrism – and Korea's image in the eyes of people living in Japan and China. Cultural proximity and ethnocentrism are regarded as key variables that directly and indirectly impact the spread of cultural phenomena and the development of country image among a diverse group of foreign countries (Burch, 2002).

Country Image and Mass Media

Nagashima (1970) defined *country image* as the picture, reputation, and stereotypes that consumers attach to products from a specific country (p. 68). Kotler, Haider, and Rein (1994) suggested that the image of a place can be defined as the sum of all emotional and aesthetic qualities (experiences, beliefs, ideas, recollections, and impressions) that a person has of a place (p. 15).

The factors that account for a country's image may be based on education and personal experience, but many people also generate a country image through perceptions that they receive from mass media (Lippmann, 1922). Following Lippmann's characterization, many scholars emphasized the importance of mass media in shaping images of foreign countries (Kunczik, 1994; Moffitt, 1994). Kim and Richardson (2003) found that people who had been exposed to an image of a place in a movie or television drama reported more favorable attitudes toward the featured location than did people who had not.

Cultural Proximity

The concept of *cultural proximity* was introduced by Straubhaar (1991) to account for the persistent success of national and regional media products vis-à-vis global ones, especially those produced in Hollywood (Georgiou, 2012). According to Straubhaar, cultural proximity refers to "nationally or locally produced material that is closer to and more reinforcing of traditional identities, based in regional, ethnic, dialect/language, religious, and other elements" (p. 51).

Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism refers to the tendency of individuals to see their own cultural group as providing the norms for acceptable behavior and preferences. It is a proclivity toward rejecting out-groups that are culturally dissimilar while blindly accepting those that are culturally alike (Sumner, 1906). Highly ethnocentric consumers favor domestic products over imports. In contrast, less ethnocentric consumers tend to evaluate products based on merits and attributes without focusing on the country of manufacture (Shimp & Sharma, 1987).

Ethnocentrism has been extensively studied in the international marketing literature for its impact on consumer product and brand evaluations (Carpenter, Moore, Alexander, & Doherty, 2013). Scholars indicate that many consumers prefer to buy products from their own countries (Sharma, Shimp, & Shin, 1995) and are less willing to buy foreign products or brands (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2008).

Based on the existing theoretical framework, in the present study we asked the following research questions to explore the effect of Korean drama miniseries television viewership, cultural proximity, and ethnocentrism.

Research Question 1: How do Korean drama miniseries television viewership in China and Japan, cultural proximity, and ethnocentrism affect attitude and behavioral intention toward Korea?

Research Question 2: Is there any difference between Chinese and Japanese viewers' attitudes and behavioral intentions toward Korea as a result of Korean drama miniseries television viewership?

Method

Sample and Research Procedure

A professional survey company was hired to conduct surveys in Beijing and Tokyo to examine Chinese and Japanese perceptions of South Korea in 2012, and a small-value shopping coupon was offered as an incentive for completing the questionnaire. After questionnaires with incomplete answers were excluded, a total of 621 valid questionnaires were collected in China ($n = 311$) and Japan ($n = 310$). The measures were translated into each country's primary language before administration. To ensure the validity of the survey instrument, each language version was backtranslated into Korean to avoid any misleading or confusing word expressions.

Face-to-face surveys were conducted in Beijing and Tokyo in shopping malls. In order to ensure that the sample characteristics did not skew toward younger ages or any gender group, a quota sampling of subgroups by gender (male and female) and age (21-30, 31-40, 41-50, and over 50) was used to distribute the samples equally into the subgroups.

Measures

Viewing of Korean drama miniseries television programs. The instrument developed by Carveth and Alexander (1985) was adapted to measure viewing habits associated with Korean drama miniseries television programs. Two viewing variables were considered: (a) the amount of time per week spent viewing Korean drama miniseries television programs on network and cable channels, and (b) the number of different Korean drama miniseries television programs viewed annually. To assess weekly viewing, respondents were asked to estimate their time spent watching these programs on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *very infrequently* to 5 = *very frequently*.

Attitude toward Korea. Attitude toward Korea was calculated through a previously-developed consumer attitude measure based on strength of favorable feelings (as rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *least favorable* to 5 = *most favorable*) held by respondents toward Korea as a country, Korean nationals, and Korean products (Mitchell & Olson, 1981). Cronbach's α value was satisfactory at .78.

Behavioral intentions toward Korea. The measure for behavioral intentions toward Korea was modified from Carrillat, Lafferty, and Harris's (2005) investigation into country image perceptions. Respondents gave a rating on a 5-point scale (ranging from 1 = *least interested* to 5 = *most interested*) as to how much they would like to: (a) visit or return to Korea, (b) learn the Korean language, (c) have a Korean friend, (d) purchase Korean cultural products, and (e) purchase Korean commercial products. Cronbach's α for was relatively high at .83.

Cultural proximity. Cultural proximity was measured by the extent to which the Chinese and Japanese viewers perceived: (a) a similar geographical proximity, (b) cultural elements as being diffused in both countries, and (c) cultural attractiveness as rated on a scale of 1 to 5, ranging from 1 = *least attractive* to 5 = *most attractive*. The metric for cultural proximity was adapted from Shenkar's (2001) scale of cultural distance. Cronbach's α was acceptable at .67.

Ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism was measured by asking the respondents three questions: (a) whether or not they preferred their way of life to other countries, (b) whether or not they felt superior to other nationalities, and (c) whether or not they were committed to purchasing domestic brands. These three questions have been used in previous studies on ethnocentrism (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Cronbach's α value was acceptable at .66.

Results

In this study we used structural equation modeling to examine three research questions simultaneously and determine the overall relational structure among the endogenous variables. To test RQ1, as shown in Figure 1, the overall model was acceptable, indicating a satisfactory fit ($\chi^2 = 174.31$, $df = 70$, $p < .001$, root mean residual [RMR] = .057, goodness of fit index [GFI] = .96, NFI = .093, Tucker-Lewis Index [TLI] = .94, confirmatory fit index [CFI] = .95). Korean drama miniseries television viewing was found to be positively associated with attitude toward South Korea ($\beta = .28$, $p < .05$), supporting the proposal that viewing these television programs has an effect on the attitude and behavioral intention toward Korea.

Although cultural proximity showed a positive correlation with attitude toward South Korea, the effect was not significant. In the model we proposed that ethnocentrism would have a negative effect on attitude toward South Korea. The coefficient for ethnocentrism ($\beta = -.16$) suggested a negative influence, but the result was not significant. Although the effect of ethnocentrism was not supported, overall attitude toward South Korea was found to be have a positive mediating effect on behavioral intention with respect to South Korea ($\beta = 0.89$, $p < .001$).

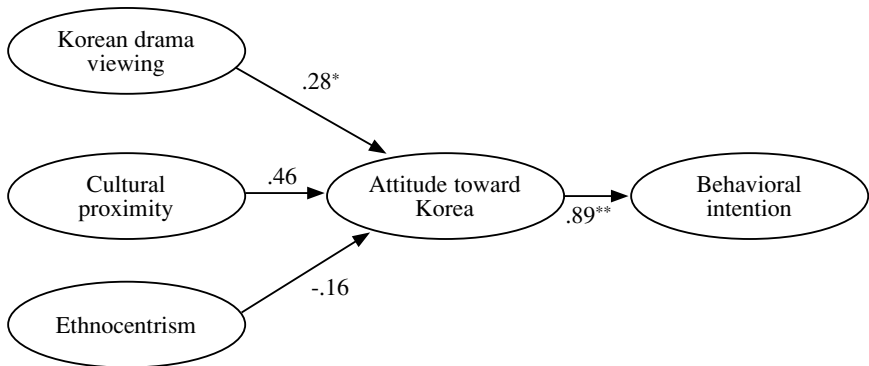


Figure 1. Combined model for predicting attitude and behavioral intention toward Korea.

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

To test RQ2, we explored the difference between Chinese and Japanese respondents' perceptions of South Korea. The Chinese model did not show acceptable goodness of fit ($\chi^2 = 154.93$, $df = 70$, $p < .001$, RMR = .054, GFI =

.93, NFI = .77, TLI = .82, CFI = .86). Only the attitude toward South Korea had a positive correlation with behavioral intention toward visiting Korea or buying Korean products ($\beta = .85, p < .001$).

On the other hand, the Japanese model showed a generally acceptable level of fit ($\chi^2 = 158.97, df = 70, p < .001, RMR = .084, GFI = .94, NFI = .92, TLI = .94, CFI = .95$). Among the path coefficients, the effect of viewing Korean drama miniseries television programs on attitude toward Korea was found to be significant ($\beta = .28, p < .05$). Cultural proximity also showed a positive effect on attitude toward Korea ($\beta = .23, p < .05$). In both the combined model and the Chinese model, the path coefficient from attitude toward Korea to behavioral intentions reached significance ($\beta = .93, p < .01$). Overall, the Japanese model fit was better than that of the Chinese model, indicating that the impact of Korean drama miniseries television viewing and cultural proximity were stronger than in the Chinese model.

Discussion

As an examination of the international phenomenon known as the Korean Wave, in this study we aimed to shed light on the effect of drama miniseries television viewing in shaping a country's image, with consideration of cultural and ethnic characteristics. Using a sample of Chinese and Japanese citizens, we confirmed the strong correlations between Korean drama miniseries television viewing and shaping positive attitudes toward Korea. Furthermore, these positive attitudes yielded higher levels of behavioral intentions such as visiting Korea or buying Korean products. We believe that visual media influences perceptions of what is attractive, interesting, and attention grabbing. Thus, the more the general public in a specific country watches television drama programs from a foreign country, the more likely they are to view the foreign country in a positive light (Kim & Richardson, 2003; Kunczik, 1997). Cultural proximity was also found to be a significant variable in predicting positive attitude toward Korea. Although previous researchers have found that higher ethnocentrism has a negative effect on country image (Shimp & Sharma, 1987), in the present study we showed that ethnocentrism does not affect country image at a statistically significant level.

Although China and South Korea share traditional Confucian values and norms, and geographical closeness, the Chinese sample did not reflect a significant level of cultural proximity with South Korea. The results suggest that the two countries are becoming more different, rather than more homogeneous, in terms of cultural values and lifestyle, which is perhaps an indication of changing attitudes in the wake of political and economic transformations. For example, Chinese people still place a high value on family whereas Korean people are becoming more individualistic and, therefore, Westernized.

In contrast, the greater degree of perceived cultural congruence with Korea among Japanese respondents suggests that similarities in the two countries' capitalist economic systems and Confucian beliefs may have had a positive effect on cultural proximity in spite of ongoing political conflicts stemming from Japan's colonization of Korea in the first half of the 20th century. In general, the results demonstrate that the concept of cultural proximity is not fixed but is, rather, flexible and dependent on factors of the sociopolitical environment.

Our findings in this study have implications for public relations practices and research into country image. Mass media still plays a key role in shaping preliminary perceptions of a foreign country. In this study, Korean drama miniseries television programs were found to be an effective form of communication media for conveying favorable characteristics of a specific country. When the public is establishing a cognitive schema for a country, television dramas and movies can be effective in delivering country information via narrative and visual channels.

Despite the usefulness of the findings, in this study we were circumscribed by several methodological limitations. First, we used a convenience sampling method; therefore, the results may not be construed as representative of all parts of China and Japan. Second, the order of causality in the research model needs to be interpreted cautiously since the favorable attitude toward Korea may motivate respondents to watch Korean drama miniseries television programs.

A beneficial avenue for future study would be to examine the effect of television programs other than dramas, on country image. First, because Hallyu has been spreading to other genres, such as entertainment shows and online games, it would be worthwhile to investigate how its different genres affect Korea's image in terms of content-type effects. Second, it is necessary to examine how different media types affect country image. For instance, with the rise of new media such as YouTube, additional research is needed in terms of the effects of old versus new media.

Conducting studies in countries with different cultural contexts and remote locations may provide more important implications in terms of intercultural communication. Since the idea of cultural imperialism, referring to the distribution of cultural products from Western countries to developing countries, has been widely noted, the Hallyu phenomena needs to be explored in depth to contribute more empirical evidence to cultural diffusion studies.

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