



## **Japanese Surfing the Korean Wave: Drama Tourism, Nationalism, and Gender via Ethnic Eroticisms**

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The Korean Wave, brought on by the popularity of serialized Korean drama *Winter Sonata*, flooded Japan from 2004 on. At the popular level, it initiated a generally positive shift in attitudes toward Korea, Koreans, and resident Koreans in Japan. Commercially, it spawned consumer trends and fads that focused on middle-aged women. This article contextualizes the Korean Wave, offers a synopsis of *Winter Sonata*, and considers ways that popular culture has the power to influence people and their attitudes toward other groups. For example, female fans of the drama's lead male challenged long-established hierarchies that positioned Japanese above Koreans and older men above younger men. Ultimately, this piece argues that the Korean Wave created a venue in Japan for dialogue on new possibilities for gender relations, new constructions of self-identities, and new pathways for interacting with other nations of Asia.

### **Preface: A Joke, an Identity Statement, or a Prophecy?**

In 1984, as a student studying and traveling in Japan and South Korea some twenty years before the Korean Wave floods Japan, I engage with a group of young Korean men in the port city of Pusan, South Korea, who tell me a joke that suggests to me their attempts to establish their own nationally defined masculine identities vis-à-vis their other two major East Asian counterparts, Japan and China. At this time, South Korea is not yet considered economically on a par with Japan. Smaller in size and population, it is neither accorded the same international awareness nor attention in terms of its heritage offerings to the world as China. Knowing I am a student of anthropology and Asian studies, they ask me—jokingly—if it is possible to differentiate among Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans by looking at them. I know not to answer this question. They continue to prompt me, repeatedly urging me to answer. I do not wish to engage in anything that might be construed as an ethnic joke; furthermore, I have a nagging suspicion that any answer I give could be considered “wrong” and potentially

offensive. They prompt me further. “Okay,” one says, “you see three East Asian men walking down the street together, a Chinese, a Japanese, and a Korean: Can you tell them apart?” I persist in refraining from any sort of answer until, finally, these young Korean men answer for me. “Of course you can tell them apart. The one who looks intelligent—he’s the Chinese. The one who looks rich—he’s the Japanese. And the one who looks sexy—he’s the Korean.”

### Contextualizing the “Korean Wave”

#### *Manifestations of Shifting Japanese Attitudes toward Koreans*

In May 2009, while on a brief research and lecture visit to Japan, I seek out places to eat dinner near my hotel and notice that, along with the other offerings for typical everyday-style meals, local restaurants serving Korean dishes (perhaps operated either by Koreans or members of Japan’s resident Korean minority) now seem common just about everywhere in Tokyo. Such restaurants are sought out by Japanese as well as Koreans, along with the sushi spots, noodle shops, and *tonkatsu* 豚カツ (pork cutlet) eateries, long a part of the common urban dining scene in Tokyo. Later, while in Kyoto, I stay with an acquaintance and spot a large, fancy-looking Korean restaurant meant for those “special occasions” when people dine out in groups with friends or colleagues. Nearby, designed to be aesthetically pleasing to modern Japanese tastes, is a new, large, and stylish Korean “super” (*sūpaa* スーパー)—an expanded supermarket and merchandise store more like a mini-department store than a supermarket. This is the first time I have encountered such a swank Korean “super”: and this is not even in an area inhabited by a high concentration of resident Koreans. Both the Korean restaurant and the Korean “super” are prominently viewable from the main highway. They seem directed as much or more toward mainstream Japanese than toward Japan’s resident Koreans.

As someone with a long-term involvement in Japan, these sightings were noteworthy to me. The situation was dramatically different twenty to twenty-five years earlier, when I lived in Tokyo as a student. It reaffirmed my belief that the “Korea Boom,” rocking Japan since 2004, has had a major impact on shifting mainstream Japanese attitudes toward Korea, Koreans, things conceptualized as Korean, and even resident Koreans (*zainichi kankokujin* 在日韓国人) of Japan. Resident Koreans have been the largest minority group living in Japan. In most cases, their ancestors came—or were brought—to Japan during Japan’s colonial period (1910–45), when Korea had been annexed by Japan and was treated as part of Japan, with Koreans as nominal Japanese citizens. The 1952 San Francisco Peace Treaty following World War II reversed this nationality label; after 1952, they no longer held Japanese citizenship, even if born in Japan (see Iwabuchi 2008, 251–

52).<sup>1</sup> Thus, resident Koreans, despite their legal definition as “foreigners,” for the most part are actually people whose families have lived in Japan for generations, who were born and raised in Japan, speak Japanese as their first language, and comprise part of Japanese society.

While living in Japan between 2004 and 2005, at the height of Japan’s “Korea Boom,” I had become aware of potentially changing attitudes among average Japanese toward Korea. The year 2005 also marked the fortieth anniversary of the 1965 normalization of relations between Japan and South Korea. Thus 2005 was designated by the two countries to be a mutually recognized “Friendship Year” (called “Japan-Korea Friendship Year” in Japan and “Korea-Japan Friendship Year” in South Korea). Since Japan had not been seen as projecting a particularly friendly interest toward South Korea prior to this popular-culture wave of fascination with Korea, it is important to attempt to understand how a schmaltzy serialized soap-operatic popular-culture drama contributed to shifting Japanese perceptions of Korea.

### *Sparkling the Flames of Japan’s “Korea Boom”*

The spark that fanned the fiery passion for things Korean in Japan was a Korean-produced television drama, *Winter Love Song*—or, as known in Japan, *Winter Sonata* (*Fuyu no Sonata* 冬のソナタ). Serialized into twenty hour-long episodes (sometimes televised in twenty-four segments to accommodate advertising and other breaks), this emotional, romantic, sometimes silly, and often soap-operatic mini-drama brought the Korean Wave, or *hanryū* 韓流 as it is called in Japanese (*hallyu* 한류 in Korean), to Japan—and the wave soon flooded the nation. Several of the main characters of the drama became major stars in Japan, prominently featured in Japanese magazines, on entertainment offerings and consumer products, and in advertisements. In particular, the main male star of the drama, Pae Yong-chun (Bae Yong-jun) 배용준 (b. 1972), rose to the peak of stellar status in Japan, and his image soon became—and remains—ubiquitous. Although his surname is Pae, the Japanese refer to him as “Yon-sama” ヨン様 (his given name, transcribed phonetically, with the honorific suffix *sama*).<sup>2</sup>

*Winter Sonata* was not only embraced by an endearing Japanese populace (and re-televised repeatedly in Japan); it also sparked other Korean take-off dramas, magazines, and media products. As the anniversary of the normalization of Japan-Korea relations approached, the Korean Wave phenomenon in Japan was positioned as something more than just a popular-culture fad: it was more than K-pop music, more than K-idols, more than K-drama. It was promoted as involving K-friends. For example, one of the many new magazines featuring Korean actors and entertainers that began to be produced in Japanese and circulated throughout Japan (often with every monthly issue containing a DVD of a new Korean drama) as part of the Korean Wave is called *K-Friends: Korea Entertainment Magazine*. Pae

Yong-chun and other cast members of *Winter Sonata* are frequently featured in the magazine, along with other Korean stars, particularly young males.

*The Context of Japan-Korea “Friendship”*

*Winter Sonata* was first televised in Japan in 2003; due to audience enthusiasm, it was repeatedly re-televised in 2004. Although other East Asian countries had been influenced by the Korean Wave prior to the *Winter Sonata* phenomenon—Chinese journalists apparently used the term *hanliu* 韩流 as early as 2001 (Lee Keehyeung 2008, 176)—*Winter Sonata* brought the Korean Wave to Japan. Once Japanese embraced the Korean Wave around 2004 (Mōri 2008, 128), they became emphatic about it. Japan’s *Winter Sonata*-induced Korea Boom created a rage for all things Korean in Japan throughout 2004. By the year’s end, Japan was the biggest importer of Korean films and dramas, accounting for nearly 70 percent of all Korean film exports (Shim 2008, 21).

Ultimately, the *Winter Sonata* drama became a pivotally featured aspect of plans for 2005 as Japan-Korea “Friendship Year.” The Korean Wave also sparked a Korean language-learning craze among Japanese. In February 2005, as part of the Friendship Year activities, the South Korean Embassy in Tokyo hosted a Korean language competition advertised, in English, as honoring “the anniversary of one-year” of Japanese-Korean friendship. (The intention, I suppose, was to commemorate the year-long celebration of friendship between Japan and Korea; but, for many people, the other wording—suggesting Japan and Korea had been friends for only one year, since infatuation with *Winter Sonata* began in 2004—made more sense.) Contestants were Japanese who were studying the Korean language, competing to see who could best mimic the actors of *Winter Sonata* through their renderings of lines from various scenes.

Another plan for Friendship Year involved the mutual issuing—in Japan and South Korea—of a new commemorative stamp featuring Pae Yong-chun’s image. This plan was highly debated in South Korea, where officials preferred more classical or official images on their postage stamps, not those considered pandering to pop-culture tastes. For Japan, it would be the first time a Korean was featured prominently on a stamp. Prior to the Korean Wave, Japan would have been unlikely to consider honoring a Korean on a Japanese stamp, given how Korea has historically been hierarchically positioned below Japan. Although the mutual release of the stamp was planned, I never heard of the Japanese version of the Yon-sama stamp being released in Japan. It is possible, then, that the plan was abandoned when tensions between Japan and Korea took their toll on the espoused Friendship Year, resulting in the cancellation of many of the year’s planned activities.

At the popular level, South Korea became a major tourist destination for Japanese, who had not previously shown such intense interest in visit-

ing the country. Propelled by the passionate popularity of *Winter Sonata*, nearly 36 percent more Japanese traveled to South Korea in 2004 than in 2003 (Hirata 2008, 143). Fans of the drama sought out locations appearing in it that were once little known to Japanese, such as Ch'unch'ŏn, Nami Island, and the Yongpyong Ski Resort area. *Winter Sonata* tours were begun and orchestrated by Korean tour companies. Although these could be joined by anyone, it was clear that many were targeted at Japanese. Such tours were often offered in either Japanese or English (and occasionally in Chinese), and signs or banners at the sites were typically written in Japanese and English. In the case of a banner put up by the city of Ch'unch'ŏn to welcome tourists to this *Winter Sonata* site location, the Japanese writing appeared on top and in much bigger lettering than the English underneath it (fig. 1). Since English is now being used as the common international language in Korea, the prominence of the Japanese language in this case shows the high impact of Japanese *Winter Sonata* drama tourism on South Korea.

My interest in *Winter Sonata* arose because the trends I was witnessing in Japan in 2004 and 2005 were contradictory to many of my earlier experiences of Japanese attitudes toward Korea and resident Koreans in Japan. Previously, little emphasis had been placed on Japanese-Korean “friendship.” Korea had not been a particularly popular tourist destination for Japanese in the period prior to the Korean Wave, and most Japanese seemed to have little or no desire to go there except if compelled to for work purposes. Historically, the first Japanese package tour to Korea was initiated in



**FIGURE 1** A banner prominently displayed across the Ch'unch'ŏn landscape, with the teenage version of the two main characters of *Winter Sonata* on the right and the older young-adult professional version of the same characters on the left, welcomes visitors to Ch'unch'ŏn as a touristic site because of its focal positioning in the drama. The larger script of the Japanese version of the welcome message suggests that most visitors to this site come from Japan. Photographed by the author in February 2005.

1906. Although Japan officially annexed Korea as a colony in 1910, it had already gained control of it by 1906; hence, this tour was saturated with the suggestion of Japan as hierarchically positioned above Korea and Koreans (Ariyama 2001; Hirata 2008). Japanese tours were also led to Korea during the 1910–45 occupation. According to Moon (2009), although the tourist destinations sought out by the Japanese in the colonial period centered on major cities, postcards sent home emphasized “images of pre-modern exoticism” (151). Such representations circulating within Japan and among Japanese thus helped establish a view of Korea as “something to be conquered, enlightened, modernized” (151).

In the years and decades preceding the Korean Wave’s impact within Japan, Japanese tourists favored Western destinations such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and European countries. The main possible exception was “sex tourism” to Korea for Japanese men; but, given its unsavory associations, such tourism tended not to be openly acknowledged.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, many South Koreans held enough resentment toward Japan for its colonial annexation of Korea in 1910, colonial intrusions into it and the rest of Asia in the 1930s and 1940s, and treatment of Korea and Koreans (despite their nominal Japanese citizenship) during the war years that Japan was not positioned as a country Koreans particularly wanted to visit as tourists—nor was there an easy eagerness toward having Japanese tourists in Korea.

The trend of large numbers of Japanese suddenly engaged in Korean language study was one of the most dramatic shifts for me. In 1985, when Japan was riding high on its own economic affluence, I enrolled in a free Korean language class given at a Tokyo ward office. Despite being offered for free, there were plenty of unoccupied seats, and the class had almost been cancelled due to insufficient enrollment. Two other women, whom I later learned were sisters (despite their different Japanese surnames), were also in the class. They were the children of a Korean father (from Korea) and a Japanese mother, and they were trying to “pass” as Japanese and not reveal their true identity. The older sister used her Japanese husband’s surname, and the younger sister used her Japanese mother’s surname. Their fear of having their half-Korean identity discovered was so great that they did not let people know they were sisters and, although they wanted to study Korean, had hesitated about taking the class for fear people would suspect they were Koreans (see Creighton 2007).

The beginning of a shift from extreme tension between Korea and Japan to one of potential “friendly” engagement in each other’s culture seems to have emanated more from popular, consumer, entertainment, and recreational culture (with tourism included as an aspect of these) than from political interactions or planned policy programs. The shift in Japanese-Korean interactions at the level of average members of the populace desir-

ing to engage in mutual exploration of each other's culture emerged with youth traveling between the neighboring Asian countries in the 1990s. The 2002 World Cup Soccer series, co-hosted by Japan and Korea, helped create further impetus to better the relations between the two countries. Then, with the popularity of *Winter Sonata*, the Korean Wave flooded Japan in full force in 2004, pumping the popularity of Korea and Koreanness to new heights in Japan.

Projecting the year 2005 as a parade of events marking Japanese-Korean "friendship" suggests that relations between the two countries had not long been conceived as particularly "friendly." As it turned out, the Korean language competition hosted by the Korean Embassy in February was one of the last big events of the so-called Friendship Year; friendship between the two countries at the political level was apparently too tenuous to make it through an entire year. Most other events had to be cancelled when political tensions—such as those over the contested ownership of Takeshima (Tokto) Island and then-Prime Minister Koizumi's decision to visit Yasukuni Shrine—rose.<sup>4</sup> Given the persisting negative feelings between the two countries due to the tensions of history—and the fact that national-level, officially orchestrated attempts at recognizing "friendship" failed severely—it is noteworthy that popular culture has been more consistent in allowing mutual engagement and the potential for better relations among the populations at the level of common individuals. As such, it is perhaps valid to state that Pae Yong-chun (Yon-sama) has likely done more to contribute to positive relations between Japan and Korea than most of Japan's political leaders. His popularity has also contributed dramatically to the economy of South Korea. Yon-sama and other Korean stars of the Korean Wave have done for South Korea what the Beatles did for England in the 1960s, in terms of sparking vast international interest in—and economic contributions to—the home country.

The following section presents a synopsis of *Winter Sonata*, necessary in order to explore more fully the impact and continuing significance of the Korean Wave in Japan—as well as the raging popularity of *Winter Sonata*'s main star, Pae Yong-chun. Then, I discuss how the drama addressed issues of identity that permeate not only Korea but also other East Asian countries. I ultimately consider how *Winter Sonata* and the Korean Wave, more generally, are used inside Japan as a context for expressing the emotionally volatile contemporary debates surrounding Japanese family and gender roles. My analysis suggests that *Winter Sonata*, clearly understood by Japanese as a Korean-made production, is being used within Japan by Japanese women for their own purposes to express their discontent and to contest hierarchies of power, nationality, race, ethnicity, and gender. In contrast, an "anti-Korean Wave" movement is reflecting a desire to re-inscribe these hierarchical definitions and forms of control within Japanese society.

## A Synopsis of the Serialized Drama *Winter Sonata*

Serialized into twenty to twenty-four episodes, *Winter Sonata* was envisioned and produced as a television mini-series. It is a prolonged soap opera-style drama in which the action and plot evolve around a group of characters who have known each other—as either both friends and rivals or as family members and co-workers—over the course of many years. At the beginning of the series, a male high school youth, Kang Joon Sang (played by Pae Yong-chun),<sup>5</sup> who is being raised by a single mother with a prominent international career as a pianist, moves into the small town of Ch'unch'ŏn (in north-eastern South Korea). All students must belong to a club at the high school he enters, so he joins the radio club. The rest of the drama follows the lives of those in the radio club and their families at this time and over the course of more than a decade.

Soon after Joon Sang joins the club, a bittersweet romance begins with the main female character in the drama, Yujin. A pertinent and persisting “love triangle” is added by the endearing devotion of Sang Hyuk, another male member of the radio club, for Yujin. Despite being newer to the scene than Sang Hyuk, it is Joon Sang’s romance with Yujin that begins to blossom, albeit often awkwardly. The drama highlights this emergence of youthful love as a representation of “first love.”

After many awkward moments and missed opportunities, Joon Sang and Yujin are to acknowledge their love on New Year’s Eve—in what is hopefully to result in a romantic interlude between the two—on the main shopping street of Ch'unch'ŏn. Amid the modern, consumer-oriented (Westernized) seasonal decorations, Yujin waits at the appointed meeting spot, but Joon Sang never shows up. She finally leaves, disappointed and annoyed at having been “stood up.” Unlike the television-viewing audience, she does not know that on his way to meet her, Joon Sang was in a major car accident. The next day, she arrives at school to encounter classmates weeping over the news of his death. As the friends understood it, Joon Sang’s mother took his body away after the crash but did not hold a funeral for him in Ch'unch'ŏn. Thus, the friends organize their own ceremony to memorialize his life and death and to say goodbye to him.

The drama then makes a sudden leap in time and place. Ten years later, the remaining friends are all young professionals and employees working and living in the mega-city of Seoul. The other young man from the high school radio club, Sang Hyuk—still devoted to and steadfastly in love with Yujin after ten years—has become a radio broadcaster in Seoul along with another male member of the high school club. One of the female members of the high school group, Chelin (the sometimes “friend,” sometimes catty rival, of Yujin), has become a clothing designer with her own boutique. Yujin is now an architect; and another of the men from the club has become a

veterinarian. Another woman from the club has never quite found her career calling, but she will eventually marry the veterinarian and find a purpose in life through raising a family.

Chelin returns from a fashion-related business trip to Paris with a new boyfriend, Lee Min Hyeung, whom she met there. Min Hyeung bears a shocking resemblance to Kang Joon Sang, the dead youth of their high school days. After he is introduced to the group, all the others are clearly aware of his resemblance each time they interact with him. Min Hyeung turns out to be the director of the ski area-construction project at Yongpyong Ski Resort—a project with which Yujin’s architecture firm is also involved.

Of course, what the main character of the drama does not yet know—but the audience suspects—is that Min Hyeung is indeed the same person as the youth from the Ch’unch’ŏn high school who supposedly died ten years previously. The plot flows into a series of multiple-triangled love affairs (Min Hyeung and Chelin versus Min Hyeung and Yujin; Yujin and Sang Hyuk versus Yujin and Min Hyeung; and even Yujin and Min Hyeung versus Yujin and memories of his former incarnation, Joon Sang). Glimpses into the similar love triangles of their parents’ generation are also revealed. The main male character eventually comes to realize he is not who he thought he was and is no longer sure what his identity is. He did not die in the car crash but, instead, suffered memory loss. His mother and a psychologist decided that, rather than “recover” his memory, they would “replace” it with what they believed to be better memories of a better past (for example growing up in a more typical nuclear family with a father). During treatment after the accident, without Joon Sang realizing it, they provided him with his new identity—that of Min Hyeung—based on a new history of his past and “new memories.”

As the suspense over whether he is the same youth from the past or someone who just resembles him begins to be solved, other questions emerge. A new issue is the realization that his absent father must have been one of the two close friends of his mother during their youth, namely either Yujin’s or Sang Hyuk’s father. (This plotline involves the daring suggestion that sex does occur in dating relationships in Korea—and did in past generations as well.) If Min Hyeung’s father was also Yujin’s own father, this problematizes their would-be relationship, while, if he and Sang Hyuk share a father, Sang Hyuk’s extended family life is problematized.

Throughout these potential revelations, Yujin seems to suffer from extreme angst. First, she is wrapped up in ten years of lingering grief over the death of her first love. Then she feels guilty about falling in love with someone else—even though it is actually not someone else—and tries to understand whether this action represents disloyalty to her first love. Even when she realizes the two men are the same person, she wonders whether she

should feel guilty toward her “first love” (or the first version of him) by falling in love with her “second love” (or the second version of the same person). Throughout, Sang Hyuk remains steadfastly loyal in his love for Yujin, despite the fact that he was unable to get her to commit to marrying him throughout their ten-year relationship.

Some have suggested that plot cannot develop in Korean drama without a car crash. With the many twists and turns of this serialized drama, *Winter Sonata* requires not just one but two car crashes. Just as Sang Hyuk relinquishes his decade-long quest for Yujin’s hand in marriage and offers her up to Min Hyeung, the main male character is involved in yet another major car accident (this time as Min Hyeung rather than as Joon Sang), requiring his removal from the scene again, this time for further medical treatment in New York City. Yujin must decide whether to go to New York to be with him, stay in Seoul to marry Sang Hyuk, or—a newly emerging possibility—go to Paris to pursue her own architecture studies. After vacillating at length between which man she should allow to have her, Yujin suddenly decides to pursue her own career in France instead. Eventually, at the close of the series, fate brings the “two” main characters together again at last—but not without yet another dramatic and emotional twist.

## **Asian Identity Conflicts & the Staging of Popular Culture**

### *Staging a Receptive Drama*

Many analysts of the impact of this drama have written off the above plot as “hokey” and little more than a means of enabling the presentation of the continuing romantic twists endured by the main characters. However, I suggest there are elements of the plotline and the “staging” of the drama that, resonating with audiences not only in Korea but elsewhere in East Asia, were part of its immense attraction. Two elements of the staging of this drama will be considered here: the characters in the drama and the symbolism of the places featured.

### *Winter Sonata’s Social Repertoire of Characters*

Barnouw and Kirkland (1992) contend that popular culture provides audiences with a “social repertoire of characters, relationships and outcomes that is used in the ongoing attempt to make sense of the world” (52). This argument may work for domestic popular culture; but did the Korean-produced *Winter Sonata* have such an attraction for Japanese audiences? I would say that it did—and that this was part of its major appeal. Trends suggesting an affinity among various segments of Asian audiences had already occurred with Japanese serialized dramas. Discussing the earlier transnational consumption of Japanese television dramas elsewhere in Asia, Iwabuchi (2004a) writes that their reach is “significant in terms of the in-

tense sympathy many young East/Southeast Asians have come to feel toward the characters in Japanese dramas, and the way they have learned to cope with the meanings of their own modern experiences through the urban lives depicted in Japanese TV dramas” (2). Dong-Hoo Lee (2004) holds that this effect has now also been shown to occur for Korean television dramas going to other parts of Asia, including Japan. He writes: “Local audiences make sense of them according to their personal context and their social, cultural, and economic milieus” (253). Importantly, the South Korean government effectively did not allow Japanese popular culture into South Korea between 1978 and 1999 (Morris 2005, 12) due to fear that Japanese popular culture, such as films and dramas, would take over the Korean scene. Ironically, then, Korea’s opening up to mutual popular-culture exchange actually facilitated the incredible reverse popularity of Korean popular drama in Japan.

Lee (2004) suggests that Japanese audiences can “read” such later-made Korean serialized dramas because they involve a genre they have already learned how to experience. He notes that Japanese drama techniques were influenced by American productions, and Korean dramas were influenced by Japanese productions. This similarity of genre allowed for the easy acceptance and applicability of meaning of Korean television dramas to Japanese audiences. Serialized Japanese television drama hits in the 1990s were classified as “trendy dramas” (as exemplified by *Tokyo Love Story* 東京ラブストーリー of 1991) in contrast to older, so-called traditional dramas. *Winter Sonata* combined attributes of both styles, thus vastly increasing its appeal to members of multiple age groups in Japan.

A noted difference between Korean dramas, including *Winter Sonata*, and Japanese trendy dramas (such as *Tokyo Love Story*) is that only the Korean dramas depict extended family relationships. For this reason, Korean dramas have often found more resonance among audiences in places like Taiwan and Hong Kong, where viewers find this aspect more attuned to their own lives, given the context of extended-family relationships and the expectation that these be respected and maintained. The inclusion of plots involving other generations and age groups of family members also helped encourage the popularity of Korean dramas among middle-aged and older Japanese.

Much interest has revolved around why middle-aged Japanese women have been enthralled with the drama and infatuated with its young male star. Middle-aged Japanese women may fantasize about their love for Yon-sama and imagine themselves in the role of Yujin. They can also relate to scenes in which Yujin acts appropriately submissive to Sang Hyuk’s mother, who, given their decade-long dating relationships, fills the symbolic role of mother-in-law to Yujin. Given the conflicts between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law in Asia, including in Japan, the older generation of Japa-

nese women can take pleasure in Yujin's continued submissiveness to the older woman, even after the older woman slaps her. After being slapped, Yujin is the one who tells Sang Hyuk they need to go back and apologize to his mother about the disagreement. Young women both in Japan and Korea told me they did not think such a situation was likely to happen anymore—that a woman symbolically in the daughter-in-law role would no longer so easily submit to such mistreatment from an older female symbolically in the mother-in-law role and would thus no longer be likely to suggest apologizing after being mistreated. However, such scenes showing this traditional expectation of submissiveness of the younger woman in the symbolic daughter-in-law position may find favor among Japanese women with adult offspring.

### *Metaphors & Meanings of Place*

In addition to the cast of characters and the themes that are orchestrated around them, I suggest the drama appealed to Japanese audiences because of the staging of place, most pertinently as reflected in the two primary settings of the drama. Japan in the last twenty years of the twentieth century was a society desiring convenient and chic urban lifestyles while simultaneously suffering a sense of loss. It was wrapped in nostalgia for the warm, embracing, collectivist lifestyles believed to have been part of the past, before modernity brought increasing urbanization, internationalization, and post-industrialization (Befu 1983; Creighton 1997, 1998; Ivy 1995; Iwabuchi 2004b; Kelly 1986; Robertson 1988, 1998). Seoul, the later residential location of the drama's group of friends, offers the cosmopolitan urban life that was the goal of modernity for many Japanese. Highly internationalized Seoul suggests the affluent, modern, and sophisticated lifestyle that has been (and continues to be) sought out by Japanese. The drama also offers Japanese viewers the smaller town of Ch'unch'ŏn, home to the drama's characters in their high school days and, for many of them, a place they return to occasionally to visit family who still live there. The imaging of the characters' past lives in small-town Ch'unch'ŏn mirrors Japanese desire for the projected memory of Japanese life in previous times focused on nostalgically remembered or imagined past rural village and small-town communities. Seoul represents the elegant and chic city life that modern Japanese desire, while Ch'unch'ŏn offers the contrasting but also desired aspects of embedded community, the "good life," and wholesome human relationships (Creighton 1998, 127–31).

Although located in Korea, Ch'unch'ŏn becomes an emblematic projection of the Japanese concept of *furusato* ふるさと. Literally, *furusato* means "old birth place" and has the meaning of "home-village community" or "hometown community." The idea of *furusato* is strongly associated with childhood and youth. It embraces the idea of place in relationship to where one's childhood and youthful memories are most strongly bonded. It

conjures up a sense of community in which one feels at home, feels a sense of belonging, feels a sense of shared engagement and union with others.

*Winter Sonata* was in accord with a more generalized modern Asian identity conflict felt in Japan that involved a desire to merge the traditional with the modern, a sense of being Asian with a sense of being Western, while living highly Westernized lifestyles. It was embraced by Japanese audiences in part because it catered to the desire to have it both ways by offering the retention of traditional values along with everything modernity has to offer, providing the continuation of small-town community life and values seen to be at the heart of collectivist Asian identity as espoused since the past, and developing the individualistic orientation associated with the West as represented in the personal friendships and romances of the drama's characters who are living independent lives in a major cosmopolitan city. The cast of characters helps facilitate this dual-identity quest through the youthful friends and lovers able to pursue their independence and individualism through trendy careers and highly Westernized lifestyles in the mega-city of Seoul (along with occasional trips to desirably imaged Western cosmopolitan centers such as Paris and New York City), while their youthful experiences and continuing presence of the parental generation in the smaller town of Ch'unch'ŏn retains the suggestion of identity as embedded in larger groups of on-going interactive family, community, and support networks. The symbolism and positioning of place facilitates this quest by contrasting the small-town community (imbued with the values of Asian interconnected human relationships) with Seoul (demonstrating the sophisticated cosmopolitan intersection of Asian modernity with the West).

## **Serializing Contemporary Consumer Culture**

### *Modern Consumer Lifestyles*

As a contemporary serialized drama and element of modern popular culture, *Winter Sonata* catered to modern orientations of consumer culture in Japan. Several of my Japanese informants indicated that the prevalence of scenes of modern consumer culture in *Winter Sonata* was actually one of the biggest reasons their previously negative understanding of Korea shifted. Prior to the Korean Wave, many Japanese had thought of Korea as a less developed country than Japan, lacking in the modern lifestyles of urban Japanese. The scenes of fancy big-city department stores, restaurants, hotels, and the featured Yongpyong Ski Resort in *Winter Sonata* allowed them to see Seoul as equally modern as Tokyo—and to see South Korea as equally modern as Japan. Korean entrepreneurs, both large and small, recognized the possibilities of creating and capitalizing on consumer trends from the drama.

Although *Winter Sonata* added parents and other extended relationships to the storyline, in other ways it followed patterns of Japanese idol dramas of the 1990s that depicted modern consumer lifestyles. According to Iwabuchi, these Japanese “trendy dramas” typically depicted “youths’ love affairs, friendships, and working life in urban settings” (2004a, 9). He continues: “The eye-catching features of [Japanese] trendy dramas were their depictions of stylish urban lifestyles and trendy nightspots abundant with extravagant designer clothes and accessories, sets with chic interior designs, and the latest pop music, all of which clearly reflected then prevailing highly materialistic consumerism of Japanese young people” (9). Similar elements are also imaged in Korean dramas. In *Winter Sonata*, these are apparent in the trendy night spots in Seoul where the characters go for dinners or drinks; the boutique run by Chelin along with the designer, party, and evening clothes it features; the restaurants with chic interiors; the sophisticated, large-scale department stores; and Min Hyeung’s swanky Seoul apartment décor. The drama thus depicts the stylish consumer lifestyles of well-off Seoul urbanites as described and discussed by Nelson (2000).

#### *Intangible Consumer Trends: New Lifestyle Choices*

Underlying Japanese television dramas were attempts to establish consumer trends. *Winter Sonata* also imaged the ideal of a middle-class consumer lifestyle, prompting consumer trends. In some cases these were planned, while in other cases the drama sparked forays of consumerism occasionally prompted by small-scale entrepreneurs.

Intentionally sparked consumer trends of the drama often involved the imaging of new, modern, updated consumer lifestyles. Rather than emphasizing materialism in terms of consumer acquisitions, the drama emphasized a “soft menu” of consumption involving experiences, feelings, and interactive intimacy. This emphasis, one not on material items to consume but on new lifestyle choices, indicated that South Korea—like Japan—had reached a level where people’s material needs were largely already met, allowing them to pursue experiences and services instead, and that many Koreans had entered the realm of global-consumption tastes of the middle to upper-middle classes internationally. Like Japan, Korea was shown as having entered the consumer age of *mono igai no mono* 物以外の物, or “things other than things” (Creighton 1992, 1994). This phrase emerged among retailers and advertisers in Japan to emphasize that, since basic material needs were largely satiated, modern consumerism instead emphasized offering people leisure, recreation, experiences, services, and other non-material aspects of life. Such an emphasis in the drama is shown in the scenes of fancy restaurants and nightlife in Seoul, the planning of a gala wedding for Yujin and Sang Hyuk (even though it never occurs), and the music and en-

tainment projected by the commercial radio broadcasts with which several of the characters are involved.

The most emphatic presentation of the new experiential global middle-class consumer orientation hinges around the ski resort that is pivotal to the later part of the drama. For several of these segments, the action takes place at Yongpyong Ski Resort, South Korea's new ski area and year-round leisure and recreational resort center. Again reiterating South Korea's advance into global consumer arenas, the Yongpyong Ski Resort was one of the three semi-finalists for hosting the 2010 Winter Olympic Games (along with Salzburg and Vancouver), even though, unlike Austria and Canada, South Korea has not had a long strong history of skiing as part of its culture, and most Koreans probably would not have even considered skiing a few decades earlier. The scenes of the ski resort suggest that skiing has now become a leisure pursuit for middle-class Koreans, as it had earlier for Japanese, and that South Korea has thus joined into this aspect of global taste patterns of consumption.

The Yongpyong Ski Resort has also become a trendy dating location, in an age when the dating scene has become an important route to mate selection. This development echoes Kendall's (1996) work on weddings in Korea, showing how the new consumerism in dating spots enters into contemporary marriage negotiations (including those for arranged marriages), dating expectations, and marital transitions. When I visited the Yongpyong Ski Resort, large numbers of Korean children and teenage youth were engaged in ski lessons on the slopes, thus acquiring global leisure lifestyle skills of members of the middle to upper classes. Yongpyong also has an on-site child-care center to allow couples with young children to continue skiing rather than giving up this pastime when children arrive. Thus, *Winter Sonata* provides new models of individualism, dating, marriage, and family relations, made possible through consumer offerings.

#### *Tangible Consumer Trends: Scarves, Socks & Other Trinkets*

Other examples of consumer trends prompted by the drama involve less monetary expense than skiing or skiing lessons. Although some fans will spend significant amounts of money on high-ticket items, recognizing profits through fan consumption is often done through the sale of less expensive items to larger numbers of people. Scarves and socks provide two pertinent examples of less expensive consumer products geared at *Winter Sonata* fans.

Scarves are featured throughout many episodes of the serialized drama. Their placement and affordable nature resulted in their becoming the material object prominently suggested in many consumer campaigns. Scarves worn in the drama symbolize concepts of "warm-heartedness," "goodness," and even "sex appeal," depending on the type of scarf, how it is worn, and,

of course, who is wearing it. Even in the romantic interactions, the scarves shown are not the silk “apricot” scarves that Carly Simon sings about in a supposed reference to her ex-lover, Mick Jagger. Instead, they are cozy, homey, wholesome scarves—and there are lots of them. Scarves are worn when the characters are high school students in Ch’unch’ŏn, and scarves are worn by their parents. Scarves are worn throughout the winter to go with different winter ensembles. Scarves are naturally worn in the scenes featuring the ski resort, which several of the young professionals are involved in building. Scarves are worn inside the trendy nightspots and posh restaurants of Seoul (although presumably such places would now be heated). The main male character, in his second incarnation as resort designer Lee Min Hyeung, ties scarves on Yujin, the female lead, showing that he is not only sexy looking but also a sensitive, warm, and caring individual, after all. Scarves are tied in a manner it would take a scarf expert to tie. Scarves are worn well into the approaching spring—by characters ironically commenting on how warm it has become.

The use of such scarves even in the projection of “sexy” involves a suggestion that sexy can stem from being “sincere” and “sweet”—and also that “sexy” can suggest “hominess” and the lack of artificiality. In one scene, Yujin is contemplating what to wear for her big date with Min Hyeung. No, she is not trying on low-cut evening dresses: she is trying on different woolen scarves. This episode leads to one of the drama’s most heart-warming scenes involving other family members, as Yujin asks her kid sister for advice regarding which scarf is best. The child exits and, upon returning, offers to lend her older sister her most prized possession for the big date: a pair of pink bunny-shaped earmuffs that would be sure to make an impression on her date.

Scarves in the same materials and patterns as those shown in the drama were marketed as consumer items in large-scale department stores, boutiques, airports, and malls within Korea (often directed at Japanese tourists) and by stores highlighting the Korean Wave within Japan. However, they were also peddled in imaginative ways by small Korean vendors. At drama sites that attract tourists—particularly Japanese fans, local entrepreneurs sold scarves that looked like the scarves seen in the particular scene of the drama filmed at that location. Recognizing the Japanese emphasis on *kata* 方, or the precise and proper form and way of doing something, vendors posted an image of the character in the drama wearing a similar scarf at that location along with a template of visual instructions on how to tie the scarf so that it would come out the same way. If one purchased the scarf, one got the instruction template with it for free. Although tourists could potentially decide to buy a scarf like it somewhere else, even back in Japan, the need for the template of how to tie it the right way secured the deal in many cases, as many scarves were worn in extremely complicated ways, too difficult to be exactly replicated without the step-by-step visual instructions.

Yon-sama socks appeared as another example of an inexpensive consumer item directed at mass sales, again often by small entrepreneurs and street vendors in Korea. Piles of socks with Pae Yong-chun's image on them were sold at traditional Korean markets, such as the Namdaemun, Tongdaemun, and Moran markets, and in street-sale areas such as those in the Insadong and It'aewön districts of Seoul. That these were directed at Japanese consumers visiting Korea is clear by the rendition of "Yon-sama" written on the side of the socks in the Japanese katakana and hiragana scripts. Some of the socks also had "Yon-sama" (the Japanese designation for the star) written in English. Japanese have long had a fondness for purchasing consumer goods with the once-"foreign" feel of English script on them; it remains popular among Japanese to have items with English writing on them (Stanlaw 2004). I discovered that female Japanese tourists seemed to prefer the exotic feel that the English alphabet still brings; they bought the socks with "Yon-sama" written in English rather than those rendered in either Japanese script.

At stands surrounding the drama sites in South Korea, vendors with carts or tables sold numerous small consumer items like photo covers and key chains, which were geared to fit the Japanese travel custom of buying lots of *omiyage* お土産 (souvenirs suggestive of specific places visited) to bring back home as inexpensive gifts for people in on-going, interconnected relationships. Other items sold were more personal favorites for Japanese women on such tours to Korea, such as pillows with large images of Yon-sama's face on them (so they really could, in a sense, take him to bed with them), T-shirts with Yon-sama images on them, or playing cards with fifty-three different views of Yon-sama (one each for the fifty-two suit cards, plus the image on the joker cards), often in either sweet and sensitive—or sexy bare-chested—poses. Such items, geared for sale to Japanese tourists, were particularly prevalent around the Ch'unch'ön house used as the high school home of Kang Joon Sang and his pianist mother in the drama. The city of Ch'unch'ön rented the house during 2004 to use for tourism, largely because of the recognition of massively increased Japanese tourism to the Ch'unch'ön area prompted by the popularity of the *Winter Sonata*. The city allowed visiting tourists to go through the house for free during 2004, and over 100,000 Japanese tourists took advantage of the offer.

The idioms of a high-level modern consumer culture, and how these were marketed for Japanese fans of *Winter Sonata*, reveal both the developed level of consumer orientation within Japan and the savvy of even small-scale Korean vendors in marketing to a particular Japanese cultural niche. Many Japanese who had formerly looked down on Korea experienced a pronounced shift in perception brought about through the consumer-oriented scenes of the drama, because they could now identify, in contrast to their previous conceptions, Seoul and South Korea as having a consumer

culture as highly developed, sophisticated, and modern as Japan. The projection of global consumer tastes and involvements in the drama also suggests a desire to prompt more South Koreans into such engagements and show South Korea's entry into an international, cosmopolitan middle-to-upper-middle-class network marked by shared tastes, activities, entertainment, and leisure knowledge. Many of the consumer offerings available at the touristic sites of the *Winter Sonata* drama, although located in South Korea, were often clearly directed specifically at Japanese tourists. This focus shows that Koreans were well aware of the popularity of the drama among Japanese fans—and of the potentially shifting attitudes toward Korea because of it. Even small-scale Korean vendors utilized knowledge of Japanese customs and culture to enhance sales through use of Japanese scripts on souvenir goods, by offering items popular among the Japanese tourists, by satisfying Japanese desires for the *kata* or precise form of doing things, and by offering items that fit expectations of Japanese gift-giving in relation to Japanese culture and travel obligations.

### **Japanese Gender Debates & Ethnic Eroticisms**

#### *Yon-sama's Reception in Japan*

A large amount of media attention in Japan has been directed at the overwhelming popularity of the *Winter Sonata* drama series among middle-aged Japanese women and their romantic infatuation with its young male star, Pae Yong-chun, fondly known as Yon-sama. The women I met as fans in Japan and those on drama tours in Korea had largely become such intense fans because of their devotion to Yon-sama. I once asked a stocky Osaka housewife I met in South Korea on a *Winter Sonata* drama tour why Japanese women such as herself came on such tours. Her emphatic response, typical of that of other Japanese women engaged in drama tourism to South Korea, was, "Yon-sama! That's the only reason!" Others eagerly took photographs of themselves next to life-size cardboard replicas of Pae Yong-chun, positioned for such purposes at drama sites and within Korea's main international airport at Inch'ŏn. At a drama site location in Ch'unch'ŏn, outside the shop run by Yujin's mother in the drama and thus the female lead character's home, was a life-size cardboard replica of both the main male and female characters huddled together, wearing their winter coats, and, of course, scarves. Fitting a pattern to which Japanese tourists are accustomed, the face of the female character is cut out of the cardboard so that visitors may insert their own face for a grand photo opportunity of intimacy with Yon-sama. This is the case, even though the location represents the female character's home in the drama! I suggested to the Korean tour guide, somewhat teasingly, that there should be another similar set of such cardboard replicas, only this time with Yon-sama's face removed—so

that men could insert their faces to mimic being with the female lead. She turned to me and patiently yet somewhat patronizingly rebuffed the suggestion of actually removing Pae Yong-chun's face from the cardboard cut-outs, stating, "There is no need."

The media obsession with the issue of "middle-aged" Japanese women in love with Yon-sama exploded on April 3, 2004, after an estimated five thousand female fans rushed Tokyo's Narita International Airport to greet him. The press described the fans as predominately "middle-aged" women, likely a visual assessment of the crowd rather than a formal tallying of ages. By way of comparison, Mōri (2008, 130) notes that just five hundred fans came to the airport to meet soccer player David Beckham, also considered immensely popular in Japan.

Even popular-culture history repeats itself. Pae Yong-chun made another visit to Japan in November 2007 to promote the opening of a photo exhibit of himself, featured at the Mori Tower complex in the posh Roppongi Hills district of Tokyo. The star had been engaged in months of work at body building, and the exhibit was a first-time showing in Japan of his new bare torso, complete with "six-pack" abs and a more muscular chest. Thousands of Japanese female fans again flocked the airport the day of his arrival. Later, the hordes of Japanese female fans pressed against his hotel, trying to get a view of the star, climbing on each other in the process. This melee resulted in several injuries, and many of the women had to be taken to the hospital—a fact widely reported in the Japanese press. Yon-sama himself was interviewed by the Japanese press and was asked what he thought about it all. True to his already prevalent Mr.-Sweet-and-Sensitive image among his female Japanese fans, he simply answered that he hoped the women were all right and that none of them had been badly hurt.

The infatuation of Japanese women with the young male Korean star of the drama, and subsequently with other young male Korean stars, was what seemed to be the biggest shock to Japan as a nation. In particular, it was the idea of "middle-aged" Japanese women in love with a younger, Korean male that grabbed the greatest amount of press and other media attention.

### *The Concept of "Middle-Aged" Japanese Women*

Before analyzing the phenomenon further, I must problematize the concept of "middle-aged women" as used in Japan. In the North American context, we may think of women around 50 years old as "middle-aged." The conceptualization is not the same in Japan. Living in Japan when I turned 30 years old, I was surprised to receive a large package from my local Tokyo ward office—a package that presumably all Japanese women registered and living in that ward received upon turning 30. Wrapped around an inner package was a paper Japanese belt (*obi* 帯) upon which was written, in beautiful calligraphy: *Chūnen na onna ni natta kara* 中年な女になったから

(because you have now become a middle-aged woman). Packaged within were several health and medical pamphlets, in Japanese, intended for women turning 30. Thus, for Japanese women, the age of 30 at least used to correspond to the beginning of what was considered the middle-age years.<sup>6</sup>

What is most noteworthy about the fandom of Japanese “middle-aged” women—here perhaps best understood as Japanese women in their 30s, 40s, and 50s, and possibly on into their 60s—for *Winter Sonata*, Yon-sama, and other young Korean male stars, was the degree of their involvement. Some of this was attributed to the intensity with which Japanese tend to adopt hobbies or other such pursuits. Several Koreans—who themselves liked the drama—indicated they believed that Koreans tended not to get “so crazy” about something, turning it into a big fad; they mentioned the Japanese concept of *otaku* おたく, fans who become totally and overwhelmingly involved in the objects of their fandom. While *otaku* tendencies might account for part of the devotion of Japanese women to the drama and its star, a review of some of the statements and urban legends growing up around the drama in Japan suggests that their fandom was being used to explore and espouse irritations with gender roles constraining them as women within Japan. Additionally, their espoused love for a Korean man came precisely at a time when many Japanese men were feeling adrift. The long-term recessive economy in Japan, along with increasing awareness of women’s desires for more independent gender roles, often left men feeling less secure, bringing their previous gender identity as income earner and hierarchical family head into question.

### *Stories of Female Fans & the Plight of the Japanese Male*

The following are two such stories of Japanese female infatuation with Yon-sama, portrayed against the plight of the contemporary Japanese male, that attracted attention of Japanese press and television talk shows. They were typical of the kind of stories that became widely commented upon and debated. Whether they represent actual incidents or are part of an emergent urban myth, the importance of such stories is shown in the attention given to them and the debates about gender and family that they sparked. Such stories typically involve the heart-breaking portrayal of a hard-working Japanese man who returns home from another day at work. Rather than being greeted by his wife (who once would have been ready with a well-prepared meal and hot bath), he instead enters his urban apartment to find the walls covered with Yon-sama posters, his own children wearing Yon-sama T-shirts, and an absent “Mama”—who has gone to her Yon-sama fan-club meeting.

Another such story goes like this: A father takes his 10-year-old son with him to do some weekend grocery shopping at a produce shop near his residence. (Already there is the suggestion of gender incongruity from so-

called traditional expectations in that the father is venturing into “women’s work” by both caring for his child and carrying out a task related to maintaining the household.) As the father is purchasing groceries from a female clerk at the store, his young son gets excited because he has seen a poster at the back of the store and recognizes the familiar face. It is, of course, a poster of Yon-sama. Seeing his excitement, the clerk asks the boy if he knows who it is. The boy responds, “*Mochiron, are wa mama no ichiban suki na hito*”: “Of course, that’s Mama’s favorite person.” The clerk, aware of the boy’s father, and now embarrassed for having asked the question, tries to rectify the situation. She says to the boy: “That’s not quite correct, is it? Your papa is your mama’s favorite person.” The boy knows what he knows. He does not pick up the clerk’s hints about his father’s feelings and instead responds to her declaratively, again pointing to the poster of Yon-sama: “*Iie, are wa mama no ichiban suki na hito.*” “No, *that’s* Mama’s favorite person!”

Such stories, empathizing with the supposed feelings of Japanese men at being less fondly loved by their women than Yon-sama and other young male Korean stars, reflect a concern for Japanese men faced with the loss of self-esteem in a prolonged recessive economy in which their job security and work advancement, long a strong basis of male identity in Japan, are in doubt. With the decline of both salaryman culture and the assurances of permanent employment, many men are struggling. Such men had previously been led to believe they were on the upper track work-wise; and they also likely once believed that Japan was hierarchically above South Korea. Now they find themselves questioning their career trajectories and facing wives, lovers, or girlfriends who are seemingly suggesting that Korean men (formerly seen as inferior) are better lovers, mates, or partners than Japanese men. Suggestions of Korean males as positioned above Japanese males clearly conflict with earlier concepts of Japanese national identity and patriarchal forms of nationalism.

What underlies the infatuation of Japanese women, in their 30s and older, with Yon-sama? Is it really his handsome face, elegant voice, and those exhibit-featured pecs? In part, Japanese women are utilizing their espoused infatuation with Yon-sama and other young Korean males, dangling these suggestions of ethnic eroticisms, to make statements about gender roles, relationships, and their own frustrations with marriage or dating involvements in the Japanese context. Repeatedly, while such Korean stars are embraced as handsome or “sexy,” it is qualities of gentleness and sensitivity that are championed as at the heart of the attraction. Thus, through their glaring devotion to Korean males, Japanese women are suggesting they feel certain desired characteristics are lacking from the Japanese men in their lives. Even before his new, more muscular body went on display, Yon-sama’s charismatic embodiment of sweetness and sensitivity is what Japanese women most cherished. Some people even suggested Yon-sama

had feminine or androgynous characteristics. This notion is consistent with Japanese gender-identity expectations that position sensitivity and sweetness as “feminine” qualities.

### *Beyond Takarazuka*

Japanese women’s devoted love for Yon-sama parallels Japanese women’s fandom of Takarazuka 宝塚, the all-female theater where women specialize in either male or female parts, as presented in the documentary *Dream Girls* (Longinotto and Williams 1994). Heterosexual Japanese women could become intense fans of the male-part players of the Takarazuka Review—even though they understand that, in real life, these parts are played by women (in a reverse parallel to the *onnagata* 女形 of Kabuki theater, where men play the roles of both women and men). Fantasy love of the male characters in the Takarazuka Review allowed many Japanese women to dream about being in a relationship with stronger romantic aspects than what they experienced with their husbands, a fantasy in which a male was nice to them, treating them sensitively as someone who was special. Both cases—the love of heterosexual Japanese female fans for the male figures (played by women) in the Takarazuka Review and the flocking of heterosexual Japanese women after Yon-sama and other Korean male stars—involve Japanese women dealing with a frustration over what they desire but lack in their personal relationships.

The Takarazuka Review provided a way for some women to deal with their frustrations silently, through the offsetting pleasures of a fantasy romance. For heterosexual women, since it was but fantasy, it did not matter that the actors playing the male parts were women. However, in the recent wave of romanticization over Yon-sama and other Korean male stars, heterosexual Japanese women are not just finding a fantasy to help them suffer through their discontent. They are instead utilizing their espoused infatuation with these young Korean stars to make statements to their husbands and to Japanese society about their discontent. Collecting Yon-sama memorabilia or dressing their children in Yon-sama T-shirts often involves an attempt to get the men in their lives to notice their discontent and their desires for more sensitive and more equal marital or love relationships. As a form of consumer engagement, Japanese women’s intense and often very publically espoused love for Yon-sama complies with Felski’s (1995) suggestion that women’s involvement in the culture of consumerism “disrupts the sanctity of the private sphere, encouraging women to indulge in their own desires in defiance of their husbands and of traditional forms of moral and religious authority” (74).

Japanese society takes stronger notice of the Korean Wave and Japanese women’s current enthrallment with Korean men precisely because something is different—and more threatening—in this wave of fandom than for

heterosexual Japanese women “in love” with the male characters of the Takarazuka Review. Whereas the love of Japanese heterosexual women for the male characters of the Takarazuka Review must eternally remain a fantasy, Japanese women’s love of Korean men can move into the realm of reality. They might not have a chance to become involved with Yon-sama or the other Korean stars, but they can get involved with other Korean men. The Korean Wave has brought the projection of Korean men as gentle, sweet, sensitive, and nice to women; thus they are potentially desirable mates. In the marriage market, newly emerging companies in Japan are offering match-making services for Japanese women and Korean men. (Reports indicate that not all such arrangements have resulted in happy couplings for Japanese women, as they come to the realization that not all Korean men are necessarily as sweet and sensitive as the imagined Yon-sama.) Equally threatening to Japanese men and society—though less likely even to be voiced—is the possibility that Japanese women will engage in extramarital affairs with Korean men.

The recent projection of Korean men as gentle, sensitive, and nice to women, hence desirable mates, stands in sharp contrast to the former ethnic erotic hierarchy as described by Kelsky (1999, 2001) and echoed by Bailey (2006), in which white Western males were seen as nice to women and hence sought after as romantic or marriage partners by Japanese women. Part of this change clearly reflects the intersections of erotic attractions with economic status. Once, white males symbolized not only niceness to women but also wealth. In part, the ability of Korean men to move into such a category of desirability has resulted from Japanese women now seeing South Korea as among the wealthier and more economically advanced nations. However, further reasons exist why Japanese women’s espoused love of Korean males, resulting from the Korean Wave, has made waves within Japanese society.

In openly parading an espoused erotic interest in Korean male stars, Japanese women are voicing, for the benefit of men’s ears, their desires for more gentle, sensitive interactions and treatment from men. I suggest they are also inverting long-held ethnic and age-based hierarchies underlying Japanese society in order to also challenge a classically prevailing Japanese gender hierarchy. Until recently, Japanese men saw their positioning as above Korean men. Older men have been positioned above younger men in Japanese versions of patriarchy, and men are positioned above women. In intentionally and overtly projecting a preferred erotic interest in young Korean males, Japanese women are, at least in the romantic and consumer arenas, positioning young Korean men above Japanese men and above older men. Since the romantic–erotic economy suggests a mirroring of other aspects of social status, Japanese women are projecting a challenge to previous ethnic and age-based hierarchies that positioned Japanese males over Ko-

rean males and older men over younger men. As shown in table 1, inverting these two hierarchies suggests the possibility of inverting the third hierarchy that places men over women.

In an essay written for the *Japan Times*, Jean-Pierre Lehmann (2002), a Swiss economist, characterized Japan as a society run by old men, for the benefit of old men. The Korean Wave as a fandom fad among Japanese women involves more than girlish projections of fantasized love with young male Korean stars. It also involves a critique by Japanese women of Japanese gender roles, constraints, and hierarchical positionings and suggests the potential to challenge the foundations of ethnic, age, and gender power rendered by senior males.

*The Anti-Korean Wave Movement*

The threat to persisting power hierarchies within Japan was countered by backlash against the Korean Wave in the form of a predominantly Japanese male-prompted, anti-Korean Wave “wave.” Referred to as the “I Hate Hanryū” counter-boom, or the *ken-hanryū* 嫌韓流 (against the Korean Wave) movement, Japan’s anti-Korean Wave movement resulted in a series of popular books on the topic that decry the Korea Boom and point out the ills to Japanese society of Korean popular culture and Japanese women’s infatuation with Korean stars. Most of the books and newspaper articles proclaiming concerns about (and possible horrendous consequences of) the Korea Boom to Japanese society that I encountered were written by men, generally themselves at least “middle-age” or older. Rather than the Korean Wave being a threat to Japanese society generally, the agitation with which the *ken-hanryū* movement was waged suggests that it was a threat to an element of established males to whom the older, officially espoused definitions of Japanese culture granted more power and control. In turn, these men

TABLE 1 Selected Hierarchies in Japan

Type	Ethnic	Age-based	Gender-based
Preexisting	Japanese ▲	Older men ▲	Men ▲
	Koreans	Younger men	Women
Inversions created by Japanese women’s Korean Wave attractions	<i>actually projected</i> Koreans ▼	<i>actually projected</i> Younger men ▼	<i>suggested</i> Women ▼
	Japanese	Older men	Men

find their views challenged by emerging (and already previously existing but now more frequently voiced) ideas of Japanese culture involving more flexible possibilities of career, family, and gender constructions—and pathways to other forms of interaction with other Asian groups.

### **Korean Wave: The Rippling Effects on Japanese Society**

The Korean Wave, brought on the tide of the popularity of *Winter Sonata*, flooded Japan from 2004 on. Although the wave may have crested, it continues to reverberate throughout Japanese society. At the popular level, it has brought about a shift in attitudes, generally in a positive direction, toward Korea and Koreans. More Japanese are traveling to South Korea, are interested in Korean customs and culture, and are even studying the Korean language. Korean-made dramas, *Winter Sonata* in particular, led to new Japanese perceptions of South Korea as a fully developed, modern nation, with cosmopolitan urban centers. At the same time, the drama presented Koreans as maintaining warm-hearted human relationships in long-term support networks, something valued in Japan as well as in other areas of East Asia.

The Korean Wave also helped shift Japanese attitudes toward resident Koreans in Japan. Whereas, once, restaurants and shops run by resident Koreans were directed at and frequented by other resident Koreans, there has been a growing tendency for these to be directed at and sought out by mainstream Japanese as well. The more positive estimation of Korea has led to a more positive estimation of resident Koreans, and sometimes a more open acceptance of their presence in Japan. Although generally a positive trend, one drawback, as discussed by Iwabuchi (2008), is that some Japanese now equate South Koreans (people residing outside Japan in another country) with Japan's resident Koreans (people who reside within Japan and have been a part of Japanese society for generations). Overriding Japanese projections of nationalism and national identity based on a rubric of homogeneity remain strong, and the collapsing of Koreans and resident Koreans can be shaped into a persisting sense of Japanese identity based on the myth of Japan as a homogeneous country.

As manifested in Japan, the Korean Wave reveals the prominence of consumer culture in both Japan and Korea. As entertainment, dramas like *Winter Sonata* and other aspects of the Korean Wave (like K-pop music) are elements of consumer culture. Tourism, including the drama tourism discussed here, is also included under the rubric of consumer culture. *Winter Sonata* and other Korean dramas and films helped raise perceptions of South Korea by showing it as a place that has entered into global consumer tastes. It also spawned consumer trends and fads.

Greatest attention within Japan has been directed at so-called middle-aged women's infatuation with *Winter Sonata*, along with their unabashedly proclaimed love for Yon-sama and other young Korean male stars. Their consumerist involvement with the Korean Wave marks an important moment in Japanese society. For perhaps the first time, the spotlight was on middle-aged women as a consumer group, providing these women with a highly visible social stage upon which to perform their emphatic fan role, while society took note. Middle-aged women were thus able to utilize their espoused love of Yon-sama and other young Korean males to voice their frustrations and discontent over their own roles and relationships within Japanese society. Their love of young Korean males challenged long-established official hierarchies in Japan that positioned Japanese above Koreans and older men above younger men. By extension, Japan's gender hierarchy of men above women was also indirectly challenged (table 1).

Such challenges reveal that Japanese do not fall into a monolithic category but that, as elsewhere, various groups attempt to (re)negotiate social realities at different times. Although Japanese fans of *Winter Sonata* and Yon-sama were often scoffed at and made to appear silly, such treatment in itself can represent attempts to offset the threat their fan involvement represented to some who wished to retain other (older) definitions of Japanese society and identity. The anti-Korean Wave backlash movement in Japan suggested that, for some Japanese, the infatuation of "our" women with foreign, and especially Korean, males was a threat to former constructs of nationalism that ascribed a lower place to both Koreans and women.

As exhibited through consumerism in Japan, the Korean Wave created a venue for presentations of and dialogue on new possibilities of gender relations, new constructions of self-identities, and possibly new formulations of nationalism and new pathways for interacting with other nations of Asia. Rather than belittling the importance of consumer or popular culture, the Korean Wave shows that popular culture can have the power to influence people and their attitudes toward other groups. It can create a momentum for positive social change—or at least the first steps in a positive direction—sometimes in more effective ways than legal, political, or governmentally designated attempts to do so. In considering the widespread effects of the Korean Wave in Japan and in other parts of Asia, as inter-Asian relations and identities are being reconfigured, I think back on that conversation with a group of young men in Pusan twenty years before the Korean Wave hit Japan. In searching for a way to positively define Korean masculine identity and, in a sense, their own form of nationalism, they did not refer to South Korea's mandatory expectation of male military involvement (as something creating tough men); they did not refer to South Korea's then-growing economic status (as something resulting from hard-working men devoting themselves to corporations); they did not refer to Korea's ancient

learning or classical contributions to humanity (often depicted as resulting from men's scholarly endeavors). Instead, they espoused a sense of positive masculine identity and source of nationalistic pride through their assertion that Korean men are “sexy.” Some twenty years later, throngs of women in Japan, and elsewhere in Asia, would chant and act out their agreement, as Korean popular culture that enveloped the rest of Asia through the Korean Wave helped raise the status of South Korea to a higher, more visible, and more pivotal presence in Asia and the world.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Japanese citizenship is granted on the principle of *jus sanguinis*, meaning descent through a biological relative, rather than through the principle of *jus soli*, meaning through birth on the soil or through place of birth.

<sup>2</sup>All names are given a polite ending in Japan, most commonly *san* さん (Mr./Ms.) attached to a surname. The more polite, elegant, and elite designation of *sama* is occasionally used, especially for very famous or high-ranking individuals. When attached to a given name, *sama* can suggest the individual is so well known or high ranking that the surname is unnecessary; it also carries a heart-warming suggestion of intimacy. Koizumi Jun'ichirō 小泉純一郎, Japan's prime minister during the onset of the Korean Wave, jokingly expressed envy over not being referred to as “Jun-sama.” Koizumi's joke suggests a realization that he himself was neither held in as highly adored status by the Japanese public nor perhaps loved in the same way by the hordes of Japanese women who became committed “Yon-sama” fans.

<sup>3</sup>The 1990s saw the rise of *esute* エステ (aesthetic, from French *esthétique*) tourism for young Japanese women; but such tourism was overwhelming focused on beauty: cosmetic and (beautifying) health treatments. “Shopping tourism” to Seoul also existed in the 1990s (particularly among Japanese women); and this phenomenon also sky-rocketed after the Korean Wave. See Creighton (2006), Hirata (2005, 2008), and Moon (2009) for discussions of the hierarchical positioning of Japan vis-à-vis Korea and of sexual forays for Japanese males into Korea.

<sup>4</sup>Yasukuni Shrine, where the souls of Japan's war dead (including several individuals marked by the postwar Tokyo Tribunal as war criminals) are enshrined, has strong associations with Japanese militarism prior to and during World War II—and with its imperialistic incursions into other areas of Asia. Thus both Korea and China have strongly objected to the Yasukuni Shrine visits of Japan's prime ministers. Koreans have also protested over Japan's enshrining of Koreans who died while serving in Japan's military. Although claiming his visits were “personal,” Koizumi went clad in *hakama* 袴, a style of Japanese clothing projecting a strong statement of Japanese national identity and hence associated with nationalism, and signed the guest book as Prime Minister.

<sup>5</sup>Names of actors and of the characters they portray sometimes appear in different Romanizations. The two identities played by Pae Yong-chun in *Winter Sonata* are Romanized in this article as Kang Joon Sang (for the high school youth) and Lee Min Hyeung (for the older professional). Following Korean custom in which the surname is placed first, *Kang* and *Lee* are the surnames, while *Joon Sang* and *Min Hyeung* are the given names the characters are called by their acquaintances in the drama.

<sup>6</sup>As a drama series, *Winter Sonata* has been very popular among “middle-aged” women in Japan; but it has also been popular to varying degrees among younger women

and among men of various age groups. Men I spoke with in both Japan and Korea—often after some hesitation—acknowledged that they liked the drama, too. The hesitation could have been because they understood it as something women were supposed to like, and therefore their enjoyment of it might call their masculinity into question. For these men, the admission almost seemed to be one of repressed romanticism, suggesting something about the context of gender expectations and identity in Japan. Under projected gender expectations, men are shown as having sexual interests, while romantic or sentimental feelings are often denied them or at least are not to be openly or publically expressed. In contrast, women are portrayed as having romantic and sentimental feelings but are often expected to deny sexual feelings. So, for many of the men I queried, acknowledging they liked the drama was seen as a “confession.” The romantic theme and emphasis on emerging “first love” also struck an emotional chord with some men. One Korean man told me he liked the drama because he also had a “first love.” In his case, in order to impress his “first love,” he had even taken her to Ch’unch’ŏn, because it was considered to have good scenery.

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