

The Aesthetic Style of Korean Singers in Japan: A Review of *Hallyu* from the Perspective of Fashion

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Abstract

Hallyu means “Korean wave” and refers to the phenomenon of Korean popular culture gaining immense popularity overseas, mostly in Asian countries. *Hallyu* started with Korean TV dramas being exported to nearby countries, but the new *hallyu* of recent years is being led by young K-pop singers. Meanwhile, the Korean fashion industry is still struggling to make a mark in the international market. This study aimed to examine the clothing styles of new *hallyu* singers in Japan, focusing on the year 2010, to extract the aesthetic characteristics and analyze why the styles are well received in the Japanese market to ultimately present indicators of possible directions for both Korean fashion and entertainment to succeed in the international market in the future. *Hallyu* singers were found to appeal to their Japanese audience with a unique and different style, cute and approachable elements and a slim silhouette, along with shy and polite body language that added to the image of gentleness already created through Korean TV shows.

1. Introduction

As Coco Chanel said, “Fashion is not something that exists in dresses only. Fashion is in the sky, in the street, fashion has to do with ideas, the way we live, what is happening.” In other words, fashion is a core part of life that is influenced by and reflects our minds and lifestyles. In the modern day where popular culture is such a large part of life and “what is happening,” the clothing selections of popular artists for stage performances, special appearances and even everyday life can create new trends that spread worldwide. *Hallyu* is a term used both in Korea and China to mean “Korean wave.” It is the great wave of popularity of Korean popular culture in other countries, mainly in the Asian region, including Korean TV shows, films and albums by Korean singers. It can be said that the *hallyu* phenomenon started as early as the 1970s, but it gained momentum and the term started to be used in around 2000. Korean actor Bae Yong-joon is one example of a major *hallyu* star. After starring in the hit TV series “Autumn Fairy Tale” Bae Yong-joon rose to stardom, mainly because of his gentle, romantic image and good looks. Men in some Asian are said to be mainly interested in making money or enjoying their own personal pastimes, and are known to be less romantic than men in other countries like the United States or countries in Europe. This is perhaps why the gentle and caring Korean man in “Autumn Fairy Tale” played by Bae Yong-joon stole the hearts of so many Asian women.

Korean men have even developed quite a reputation for being “gentlemen” because of *hallyu* TV drama series. Bae Yong-joon is especially famous in Japan, even more so than some Japanese stars. Japanese people have given him the nickname “Yon-sama” meaning “Prince Yong,” and many Japanese tourists, mostly women, come to Korea on “Yon-sama package tours” which include a trip to the restaurant owned by Bae Yong-joon, the beauty salon where he gets his hair done, a tour of the upscale areas where he is known to frequent and shop, and even visits to the set of films he is filming. However, Bae Yong-joon is not the only *hallyu* star in Japan or other countries where *hallyu* has spread. Walking down the street in the famous Harajuku neighborhood in Japan, one can easily see retailers selling pictures of *hallyu* stars like Korean actor Kwon Sang-woo, Korean actress Choi Ji-woo and Korean singer Jang Nara, and a wide variety of products with pictures of *hallyu* stars printed on them such as mugs, socks, underwear, T-shirts and key rings. *Hallyu* for singers really started to become apparent in 2000, when the popular boy band H.O.T. held a very successful concert that sold out in China. Since then, many Korean singers have advanced to release and promote their albums in other countries, including BoA, who went to Japan at such a young age and speaks the language so well that many Japanese people actually think she is a Japanese singer.

In recent years, there has been a new *hallyu* focusing on young singers. The girl group consisting of nine very pretty, young girls called Girls' Generation and the boy band SS501 are two major examples. These new, young singers are not only popular in other countries for their songs, voice and diverse and unique personalities, but also for their looks. Most Korean singers and groups either have a very distinct look or are a mixture of members with different looks to please people of all tastes. Their personalities may be "real" but their styles are usually thoroughly and carefully thought out and prepared beforehand by professional stylists and the help of a marketing team. Their styles go on to become a large part of who they are as celebrities, and what kind of image they will develop. The image affects everything they do professionally, including their music, what kind of issues they support and what kind of advertisement deals they get, and most of all, they affect who will become their fans and imitate their looks. The general aim is to create a syndrome and present a look that is widely loved and imitated, but also to look different, stylish and new.

The aim of this article is to examine this aesthetic aspect of *hallyu*, from the perspective of fashion and provide useful information on the aesthetic characteristics of *hallyu* fashion that are received well and succeed overseas based on analysis of recent singers' styles. Despite past speculations that the future of fashion would be uniformity, such as the all-white outfits portrayed in science-fiction films based in the future, for example, the spread of fashion throughout history has gone in the opposite direction and led to great stylistic variations and diversity (Svendsen 2006, 156). Yet our consumption patterns tell us that choosing an outfit out of the numerous fads, fashions and choices out there is still an important decision that makes a big difference to us (Svendsen 2006, 157). Fashion in Korea is diverse, too, but Korea has not yet established a set aesthetic or image for itself like American sportswear or chic French fashion. Meanwhile, parts of the world seem to be developing great obsessions for *hallyu* stars and everything they do and wear, so examining their styles could be a starting point to discovering a key or element for developing and promoting Korean fashion.

This article will focus on Japan because Japan is one of the main countries where *hallyu* is apparent, and is also a country that influences international fashion through its many prestigious designers and brands, and well-known bold and unique street fashion. With the world so interested in what is happening in Japanese fashion, perhaps elucidating what it is about Korean fashion worn by *hallyu* stars is successfully received in Japan will lead to an elucidation of how Korean fashion can appeal and relate to the international market. The area of *hallyu* this article will focus on is singers because singers are comparatively recent and new with less information on the phenomenon compared to TV shows and actors, and they have more freedom when choosing what they wear since they are not characters on a TV show and can dress differently according to what kind of song or album they are promoting.

2. Major trends in popular culture history

Traditionally, major trends in fashion are known to be started by designers. Fashion journalists affiliated to reputable fashion magazines and newspapers around the world flock to New York, London, Paris and Milan in time for fashion week and report the new trends in color, material, style and silhouette they see on the runways. The rest of the fashion world and the public reads about these trends and get ready for the next season. However, it is a known fact now that the opposite is possible, too. Trends can start on the streets. Young people and people with unique tastes can start new trends on the streets that can inspire designers to make them even more widespread. Yet another way trends spread that is sometimes overlooked is that they are very often started by stars – people in the public eye that the masses generally admire or simply like to look at. Louis XIII started a trend of wearing big white wigs when he started to go bald and decided to cover his baldness with a wig, and women copied the hairstyles and clothing styles of Wallis Simpson in the 1930s. Even fashion experts agree that major styles are started and set by a handful of influential people.

The late fashion consultant for the Academy Awards, fashion director and author Patty Fox said that ten women who took their look into their own hands to create a personal style and ultimately, an image for their business, set the standard for Hollywood glamour – Audrey Hepburn, Marilyn Monroe, Doris Day, Lucille Ball, Katharine Hepburn, Joan Crawford, Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, Dolores Del Rio and Gloria Swanson (Fox 1995, 1). While these people may indeed have set the standard for old Hollywood glamour, a whole new world of young popular culture started in the 1950s. Youth culture started in the United States in the 1950s as the country prospered economically, teenagers had income they could spend on themselves, and they also began to consider themselves different from adults.

Youth started to enjoy an exclusive culture including music, hairstyles and clothes, and Elvis Presley, a star of that culture who would later become “The King” of rock and roll, influenced this new culture for teenagers with his clothing choices (Doll 2009, 10). Many elements of his look, including long, slicked back hair, a shiny Beale Street suit with wide-legged trousers, and eye makeup, were considered shocking, but made girls scream with joy and young men want to imitate the image (Doll 2009, 12-13). Not only singers, but also actresses and in some rare cases, people in politics, such as Jacqueline Kennedy, set great trends in history. First Lady of the United States in the 1960s, Jacqueline Kennedy, is a famous figure whose style came to define her. After marrying into the extremely powerful political family, the Kennedys, she was expected to represent herself and her husband well, and fulfilled that role well. She apparently worked with designers and involved herself in the process of developing her looks, from pattern sketching to fabric selection. The public loved her elegant, effortless looks from suits and sheaths with pearls during the day to sleek understated evening dresses with opera-length gloves and diamonds. Their image sent a message of youth and a bright, happy future to the people of the United States at a point when television was ubiquitous for the first time (Swimmer 2009, 15).

Though some may not consider politics a part of popular culture, President Kennedy was the first president of the age of television and also a very young president, and people truly loved watching them and considered them the ideal American family. With all the attention they were receiving, including the attention of the young, the old and the mainstream, it would not be a far stretch to say they were a part of popular culture and the young and beautiful first lady was a part of popular fashion. In 1976, actress Farrah Fawcett of *Charlie's Angels* fame captured the hearts of boys, teenage girls and their mothers with her perfectly styled natural hair, bell-bottoms and Nike sneakers. It was a time when the world was changing, women in particular, and though she dressed in jeans, she had an undeniable sexiness to her look and was considered a sex symbol (Editors of People Magazine 2009, 5). John Travolta was another major fashion phenomenon in the 1970s after the film “Saturday Night Fever.” All young men wanted to dress in flannel shirts, suits and platform shoes like John Travolta’s character in the film, and all women wanted to dress in tricot knit dresses and spandex tops like Olivia Newton-John (Choi et al. 2010, 445).

Madonna is a name that comes up again and again in fashion. She has tried so many different styles that appear “new” in the moment that it is difficult to pin down a certain “Madonna look,” but one common point of all her looks is that they seem to try to break down any barriers, whether they are barriers of gender, race or any other discriminating factor, and attempt to be free. Madonna first appeared on the popular music scene in the 1980s, and with hit songs like “Like a Virgin” and “True Blue,” she soon became a very influential pop star, straight through to the 1990s. Her looks were studied by scholars and imitated by youth, from her bandana and rough leather jacket of the eighties to her sexually-charged lingerie-influenced looks of the 1990s (Mehmet 2004, 4-5).

After fifty years of continuous growth of popular culture, the market was still not oversaturated. Celebrities actually started to expand their marketability and venture into different areas, not only acting for singers and singing for actors, but even including launch of a fashion line and writing books about their fashion sense and lifestyle, just to name a few. The highly developed internet has turned everyday fashion of celebrities into a very big deal, with paparazzo taking photos and websites uploading them every day for the whole world to see. One celebrity who has benefited from this phenomenon is Victoria Beckham. The public loves her style – typically oversized sunglasses, a tight shift dress or jeans, and Hermes bag and platform heels. Victoria Beckham, former Spice Girl and famous beautiful wife of soccer star David Beckham, wrote “Victoria Beckham: that extra half an inch,” a book about fashion, beauty and style. In it she writes, “I’m not a six-foot-tall model, nor am I a pin-up for men, and, for this book, that’s my strength, because I’m a girls’ girl” (Beckham 2007, 11). She stresses that money has nothing to do with style and offers advice on how to look good and achieve the cool air she always seems to have.

Current First Lady of the United States Michelle Obama is also a much talked about subject in fashion these days. She has a sleek, streamlined, classic, colorful and bold look. She likes to bare her arms, wear simple separates like cardigans and skirts, and loves dresses. She is known to wear younger less-known designers and give them exposure, such as Jason Wu and Isabel Toledo, and sensible enough to wear brands that are not high end such as J. Crew and H&M (Swimmer 2009, 26-28). Her look is modern and American, and the public loves to imitate it and talk about it. Newspaper articles on the styles worn by Michelle Obama can even frequently be seen in major daily newspapers in Korea. However, it should be noted that the Kennedys, Princess Diana and Michelle Obama are rare exceptions of modern day politicians being considered celebrities.

Most are just respected, or well-known, politicians without celebrity status. There are books like “US Secrets of Celebrity Style: A Crash Course in Dressing Like the Stars” by Dale Hrabí (2005) and several other similar books available for people who look to celebrities for style inspiration and guidelines. So what is it about the looks of celebrities that we are so drawn to? One important point is that the looks we see on celebrities are not as “natural” as we would like to think. Admittedly, people generally do not “throw on” anything they can get their hands on in the morning anymore, but put some effort into looking “effortless,” based on the great floods of fashion and style information they are exposed to through mass media, including TV, magazines, newspapers and the internet. However, celebrities often put in more effort than the average person, not just into their looks, but all aspects of self-representation. They train and prepare themselves for the art of self-representation through lessons and guidance in dance, speech and fashion, just to name a few (Nayar 2009, 177).

The examples examined above are all different. Some looks are sexy and shocking, but some are elegant. Some materialize a new ideal of the times, like Farrah Fawcett’s look, and some are rebellious and challenge widely accepted notions, like Madonna’s looks. The common points of all these looks are that first, they are all different and new, and second, they are approachable in that people feel like they want to and can imitate the looks. There have been stars who have dressed according to the main trends of the times, and those who have dressed in an extreme style that cannot easily be copied, but they are not the ones who end up starting major trends. People like to see something they have never seen before, but something they can instantly like and copy. Another big part of the trends set by stars is that people like their public persona and are extremely interested in their lives and personality, too.

It is not just the extraordinary beauty and charisma of the people in the public eye that make them so special and admirable. People are attracted to the lifestyles of the rich and famous because after all, who does not dream of becoming either rich or famous, or both? It is natural for people to aspire to be something that seems better than they are now, and this tendency was apparent in the early twentieth century, too, when the illustrations of Charles Dana Gibson, who did “lifestyle illustrations” rather than simply fashion plates, were extremely well-accepted by young women at the time and the “Gibson Girls” he drew, as they were nick-named, were a fashion icon (Blackman 2007, 8). They were ambiguous characters in some way, but they had a specific lifestyle – they were young, healthy, active, sexy, free and bold. Now, people have a face to the “Gibson Girls” they aspire to be like or simply like to look at. They even have names – like Madonna, Mariah and Jennifer – and sometimes people know where they live and where they like to shop or eat.

3. Brief History of the Korean Wave, *Hallyu*

Hallyu means “Korean wave” in Korean and is also written in Chinese characters to have the same meaning. It was first used to indicate the wave of popularity of Korean pop culture in China, but is now used to refer to its popularity in any other foreign country – mainly in Japan, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Vietnam and Thailand – and expands not only to pop culture such as TV drama series or singers, but also to include areas other than pop culture such as sports or fashion design. However, an explanation is needed as of yet when it is used to refer to another field. For example, one would talk about “a sports *hallyu* in Europe.” Therefore, in this article, the term *hallyu* will be used to refer to “the wave of popularity of Korean pop culture in other countries,” and *hallyu* created by singers in Japan will especially be a point of focus. It is unclear how the term *hallyu* was coined. Written in both Korean and Chinese characters, people are even unsure whether it started in Korea or China. It started to become widely used in the early 2000s, but *hallyu* actually existed as early as 1997. The Korean TV drama series “What is Love” was broadcast in China in 1997, and recorded ratings of 4.2 percent. Considering even a 0.1 percent rating was considered a success because of the lack of TVs in the country, 4.2 percent was an amazing result.

Then, several other series including “Stars in My Heart,” “Autumn Fairy Tale” and “Daejanggum” continued to be great hits (Hwang 2009, 204). It is general knowledge that Korean pop culture is successful in other Asian countries mainly because of the romantic and family-focused values of Korea portrayed in TV dramas, films and songs. Many Asian countries share a similar traditional background where men were the fighters and women married into the family of the man to live quietly and passively. Men still maintain a strong, cold image in some countries, but men portrayed in Korean pop culture are hopelessly romantic. They sacrifice their entire lives for women and love just one woman throughout their lives. Also, in a world where young people are more independent than ever, young Korean people in Korean TV dramas still respect their elders and always think hard about their family when making an important decision.

These elements are what touched the hearts of foreign viewers. A study found that Japanese viewers mostly view “romantic” TV dramas, and find Korean shows “informative” and “touching.” They also find Korean shows are different from Japanese shows because of the “sacrificial love,” “vague psychological layout” and “conservative way of thinking” conveyed in the shows (Kim 2005, 28-31). “Vague psychological layout” indicates the subtle ways emotions are expressed and how the feelings characters have for each other are shown or kept secret. The wave continued in K-pop, or Korean pop music, in 2000, when the concert of the Korean group H.O.T. held at a sports stadium sold out for the first time for a foreign singer, and singer Jang Nara’s album sold more than 1 million copies and won a Golden Disk Award for Most Popular Singer (Hwang 2009, 204). 20 million dollars worth of Korean films and TV programs were also exported to the Asian market in 2000, including “Swiri” and “JSA” (Kim 2001, 240).

Hallyu fundamentally started to grow into a phenomenon in Japan when “Autumn Fairy Tale,” titled “Fuyu no Sonata” in the country, which originally aired on the NHK cable TV channel in 2003 aired again on a major national network in February, 2004. Since then, a wide variety of Korean programs are being broadcast on national networks, cable TV channels and satellite TV, and interest has increased tremendously in Korean actors, shows, music, films and related products (Sohn 2004, 34). The *hallyu* phenomenon is actively supported by the Korean government and Korean companies, not only because it is a great pride to be recognized and loved by other countries, but also because it leads to positive economic effects, too. People who become fans of Korean actors or singers through TV dramas or performances overseas develop an interest in Korean culture in general, such as food, and a liking for Korean products. They actually purchase more Korean products, especially if they learn that the actor, actress or singer they love uses the product, and even visit Korea more often (Hwang 2009, 206). A study found that consumers have a stronger attachment to a *hallyu* “brand” – brand meaning a celebrity, TV show or film – when they have awareness of higher quality of the brand. Consumers also conduct stronger related actions when they consider the brand to be of high quality, and gain stronger faith in the brand (Lee 2007, 92). Obviously the highly popular *hallyu* stars are generally considered of “high standard” so their fans have strong faith in them.

This is the simple reason why many Korean fashion brands use *hallyu* stars as models, such as actor Kim Bum for Edwin. However, although fans will flock to see Kim Bum for a signing or event and gradually develop a tendency towards a brand he is a spokesperson for, what they want even more is to buy the clothes that he actually wears in a TV show or in real life. Therefore, the brand that he wears personally also benefits, perhaps even more, and brands that design the styles that he wears sell well, too. There are major national benefits outside of fashion, too. Travel packages to visit *hallyu* stars are all the rage in Japan, and at the end of the year, thousands of tourists sign up for “K-pop tours” that take them to see the award ceremonies in Korea (Kim, Newsis December 28, 2010), contributing to tourism in Korea in a big way. The ambitious and successful TV drama series “Dream High” starring many K-pop singers and Bae Yong-joon, one of the first and still madly loved *hallyu* stars, was shot in Goyang City, and the city recently announced plans to develop into an international *hallyu* city. There is even evidence of new methods of *hallyu* marketability in Japan, where *hallyu* cafes that offer drinks, tea, coffee and photographs of *hallyu* stars for sale, are starting to pop up (Lee, TV Report December 31, 2010).

There is no way of knowing whether *hallyu* is a temporary trend, whether it will reach a peak and stop developing any further at one point, or whether it will continue to grow and diversify limitlessly. There are even groups of people in China who get together through internet clubs to claim China should stop importing Korean pop culture and focus on developing its own industry. This is in some ways similar to how Korea was against importing Japanese culture in the 1970 and 1980s. However, Japanese culture is free to advance to Korea now, although it has not spread as successfully as *hallyu* in Japan or other countries. The mainstream opinion on the future of *hallyu* is that it is sustainable because it has diverse and highly competitive cultural contents and is continuing to spread to new countries (Kim 2008, 338). If *hallyu* does end up sustainable in the long-term, as is the direction it seems to be going at the moment, *hallyu* could be considered more as cultural exchange and an expanded market than a temporary “wave,” and there would be great significance in studying the many different aspects of *hallyu* and how it could develop and establish itself further in the future.

4. *Hallyu* Singers in Japan, 2010

A popular entertainment news TV program on a major national channel in Korea introduced “new *hallyu* that is mesmerizing the world.” New *hallyu*, pronounced *shin-hallyu* in Korean, refers to the new wave of young K-pop singers that are venturing to overseas countries.

Hallyu in the past focused on films and TV dramas, and a big part of *hallyu* fans were middle-aged women, but the new *hallyu* has made Korean pop culture popular among a younger generation. Japanese press and media are also using the term new *hallyu*, and this time, the wave is so great that Japanese weekly magazine Aera even called the appearance of young Korean singers in Japan a “Korean invasion” (Lee, Polinews December 30, 2010). According to the results of a 2010 survey announced at the 2010 *Hallyu* Forum sponsored jointly by the Korea Foundation for International Culture Exchange and Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the K-pop wave in Japan was the third biggest *hallyu* wave in 2010, after an economic *hallyu* boom focusing on electronic products, and Korean food *hallyu*, and music was found to be the number one type of *hallyu* contents, ranking higher than games, TV programs and films (Kim, MK News December 1, 2010). It could be argued that TV programs and films are now stabilizing after reaching a high peak, and the same will happen for K-pop, but the fact is that K-pop was extremely popular in Japan in 2010 and is continuing to do well. This is leading to younger *hallyu* stars and a younger and wider fan base.

The biggest *hallyu* musician in Japan is probably BoA, who has actively performed, created albums and worked in Japan since 2001. She was one of the first Korean pop stars to actively advance to the Japanese market. From a very young age, she was trained with this goal, learning Japanese and Japanese culture. All six of her albums released in the country from 2001 to 2008 made it to the top of the Oricon Chart, the most reputable music chart in Japan, and her two best albums made it to first place, too. However, BoA had to actually move to Japan and live there to build up her success. This is not the case anymore. Korean singers can release an album in Korea and then simply visit Japan short-term to promote a song or album and still be successful, thanks to the development of *hallyu*. Japanese people are more aware of and interested in K-pop. BoA performed many of her songs in Japanese and some Japanese people do not even know that she is Korean.

They say that beauty is universal, and perhaps this is what helped BoA, and also why Korean girl groups are extremely popular both in Korea and Japan. Two major new *hallyu* stars are the girl groups Girls’ Generation and Kara. Girls’ Generation was the first foreign girl group in thirty years to rank number one on the Oricon chart in October, 2010, was selected as one of the “Top 10 Outstanding Artists of 2010” by a Japanese music program. They also received the Newcomer’s Award at the 52nd Japan Record Awards. Girls’ Generation consists of nine group members. They are all young, in their late teens to early twenties, and have a youthful, playful and flirty style. They perform catchy songs and are considered one of the top girl groups in Korea, too. Kara is also a popular group in Korea, though not as popular as Girls’ Generation, but they are just as successful and popular as Girls’ Generation in Japan, showing that venturing overseas can be a good business decision. There are five members to the group Kara. They are young, too, but have a slightly edgier and sexier feel than Girls’ Generation. Their song “Mister,” which includes a hip swinging dance that is fun and sexy, was especially successful in Japan. They ranked 2nd on the Oricon album chart just two months after they started to promote the album in Japan, even though the songs are all in Korean, and was also selected as one of the “Top 10 Outstanding Artists of 2010.”

Kara and their song “Mister” are so popular in Japan that Japanese celebrities even dressed up like Kara on national television. *Cosupure*, meaning “costume play,” is a form of dressing and entertainment popular in Japan where people dress up as anything and anyone, but usually someone they are obsessed with or related to a fantasy, such as a character out of a game or comic book. Korean newspapers reported on the great success of Korean singers in Japan in December, 2010, when Japanese celebrities did *cosupure* as Kara and BoA on a major network (ENS December 31, 2010). Boy bands are all the rage in Korea and did well in Japan in 2010, too. However, Korean boy bands are not like the typical boy bands of the 1990s in western countries like Take That or New Kids on the Block. They are more fashionable, wear makeup, and have a strong vibe about them, often showing off muscular bodies. The hip hop-based K-pop band Big Bang is set to fundamentally start promoting themselves in Japan in 2011, but their songs already gained popularity in 2010 through international broadcasts and the group was awarded the Excellent Work Award at the 52nd Japan Record Awards. The five members of Big Bang have a variety of different looks, but the band is also known to be equally talented, with all members being capable of high standard singing, rapping and dance, unlike some groups where some members look better than others while some sing better than others. In an age that is tuned more towards electronic music, Big Bang also offers authentic electronic hip-hop based music with a distinctly K-pop feel. Another Korean boy band that was extremely successful in Japan in 2010 was Cho Shin Sung, which could actually be a bit of a surprise to people in Korea, because it is a fairly less popular group in its homeland.

However, perhaps because of hallyu, and perhaps because of their heart – the members studied Japanese and the group sings in Japanese when performing in Japan – Cho Shin Sung is doing well in Japan. After entering the market in 2009, they climbed up to number 7 on the Oricon chart in 2010 and performed at the Yokohama Arena, a place usually reserved for Japanese singers. Other boy bands that entered the Oricon chart include the large boy band with thirteen members, Super Junior, and the newer and younger five-member boy band SHINee. The late Park Yong-ha, an actor-turned-singer who starred in one of the original *hallyu* TV series “Autumn Fairy Tale,” passed away in 2010. He was one of the most successful Korean singers in Japan, and since his passing, other younger solo male artists are trying to follow in his footsteps. Park Jung-min, a member of the boy band SS501, announced that he would start his solo career in Japan, and all four of his “fan meetings,” or mini concerts, sold out. Then, solo artist 9th Street, not established in Korea either, debuted in Japan in 2011 through the MJTV concert, “Music Japan TV presents K-POP LIVEHOLIC 2011.” Park Jung-min has the advantage of being part of a famous group, but Korean artists are increasingly trying out the Japanese market, which warmly welcomes Korean singers, before attempting to establish themselves in their more competitive native country. Solo artist Yoon Gun first became known in Japan when he sang the theme song for the popular Korean TV series “Sad Love Song” starring actor Kwon Sang-woo and actress Kim Hee-sun, who are both very famous in Korea and overseas.

His fans remained loyal since the program aired in 2005, and when he went back to Japan for the first time in four years in 2010, to promote a book of essays, he was received very warmly through a successful fan meeting. It is not only K-pop singers that are experiencing success in Japan. Perhaps largely thanks to the help of *hallyu*, Lim Tae-kyung, the top crossover singer of Korea, held an extremely successful concert in the country in December, 2010. Lim Tae-kyung currently sings crossover genres such as pop opera, is a tenor and a musical actor, and has plans for diverse new attempts in Japan. Many more Korean singers revealed plans to start working in Japan from 2011, in 2010. The highly popular girl group 2NE1, which is already largely successful in the Philippines as a member of their group originally debuted in the Philippines, announced it would fundamentally start appearances in 2011, and even actress Yoon Eun-hae, who was originally a member of a Korean girl group but later turned into a successful actress after the group parted ways, announced she would start a singing career again in Japan. Another actor who plans to start a singing career, not in Korea but in Japan, is Park Hye-jin, who will first test the waters by singing a theme song for a TV drama and then release a single album. Similarly to Lim Tae-kyung, singer Park Hyun-bin is a singer of an unconventional genre.

He is a new generation “trot” singer. “Trot” is a traditional Korean song genre and Park Hyun-bin is one of a handful of singers who have added a modern K-pop-like beat and look to the genre. Park Hyun-bin is the first to advance to a foreign country with a traditional genre, and has already closed an exclusive contract with the headquarters of the entertainment company Irving in Tokyo. Girl groups, boy bands, solo artists and singers of non-mainstream genres experienced great success in Japan in 2010, and many other Korean singers appear to have plans to start a career in the country, too. Korean singers offer something for everyone with their diversity. Girl groups and boy bands include members with their own carefully calculated unique image so anyone can find a type they like in the group, and solo artists either stick to a certain image and focus on their fans or sometimes change their look and type of music to show off different sides and keep up with the current trends while offering great entertainment. Each group or singer is unique and offers something different, but they are all similar in that the *shin-hallyu* singers are young and offer a youthful energy that is different from the reserved characters one might see in a Korean TV show. Korean singers in Japan may have a polite and cautious air about them during interviews, but they are very well prepared – Korean entertainment companies are known to train potential singers from a very young age for three to five years – and perform spectacularly on stage. The change of clothes and hair styles each time they sing a different song is another unique characteristic that adds an element of entertainment.

5. Hallyu Singer Fashion in Japan and the Secret Behind Their Success

One secret of success of Korean singers is something that comes naturally to Korean singers. In Korea, singers promote an album for a certain period of time, and especially promote a certain song, and then another song, in order. The period when they are “working” is very calculated and set, and once they stop doing their rounds on various types of media including TV, radio and magazines, they take some time off and work on the next album. Singers can frequently be heard saying “when I was actively working” or “when I was taking time off.” Singers in other countries sometimes say they took time off after a big event like a tour, but they are generally considered to be “working singers” full time. However, the period when singers perform and are on TV, and when they are not, are strictly considered separate in Korea.

When they do “work,” they have a certain choreography routine, hairstyles, makeup and clothing style set for each song they sing on stage. These are all planned out and prepared while they are “not actively working,” or off the screen. For example, Girls’ Generation wore short, sexy versions of a military uniform and created a unique dance focusing on leg movements for their song “Tell Me Your Wish,” but changed into all black leather and satin outfits with heavy eye makeup and a dance that included running movements for the song “Run.” Each time they go on stage to sing these songs, they wear the same kind of outfit, hair and makeup, and dance and move in exactly the same way. Not one member moves in another direction or dances in a different way. This change of costume for each song makes each song fresh, and even knowing what the look and dance will be for a certain song becomes fun. Experts say this is an aspect that contributes to the popularity of Korean singers overseas (Kim, iMBC December 27, 2010). One singer can wear look like a rocker for one song, and wear a completely different hip hop style for another song. There are hardly any countries where singers completely change their look for each song, and in the case of Japan, some younger singers do change their style, but the range of change is narrow and older musicians tend to stick to their own style. Therefore, the fun new styles of Korean singers are an element of added fun.

In this article, photographs of *hallyu* singers actually performing or making a public appearance in Japan in 2010 were used for analysis of the formative characteristics of *hallyu* singer fashion and to find out what element about fashion appealed to the audience in Japan. The two extremely popular girl groups Girls’ Generation and Kara both aim for a sexy but girlish look. However, Girls’ Generation is more girlish and cute than Kara, and lower down on the sexy scale. For a performance at an awards ceremony in Japan, the girls wore silver shiny t-shirts with shorts or a balloon-silhouette miniskirt. They wore t-shirts in a few different designs according to the figure or image of the member, from asymmetrical tops to short tops that showed their navel with fur on one shoulder. Each member had a different hairstyle that seemed to reflect all possible preferences of young men or women, including dyed hair with bands, long hair, short hair, hair tied back in a pony tail and hair with a dainty clip in it. Their makeup was pretty but not too exaggerated, and the look was completed with the feminine touch of white high heels. Another important part of the look included their body language and choreography, which showed them keeping their legs together and looking feminine and reserved, which is what seems to have added to the feeling of girlishness over sexiness (Figure 1).

For another performance just after receiving an award, they wore black PVC shorts, silver glittery tight long-sleeved t-shirts that were short but showed some skin but did not show their navel because of the high-waisted shorts, PVC vests with strong angular shoulders and thigh high boots. This time, all members wore the identical outfit, but added their own individuality to the neutral-colored look with their hair color and styles. They wore pretty makeup that was slightly darker this time, and kept their knees close, hands together and generally maintained the shy and proper body language as they sang and waved to fans. Kara is slightly more on the sexy side than Girls’ Generation, and the image is created through their sexy choreography, darker makeup and sexier clothes. For a performance in Japan in 2010, they wore high-waisted PVC shorts, a blouse with black and white geometrical patterns, and leather thigh-high boots. Similarly to Girls’ Generation, they each had very different hair styles, including brown hair, dark blonde hair, hair tied back and half up, long hair and a very short pixie cut.

However, their sexy makeup that emphasized the eyes was different from Girls’ Generation, and although the look was similar to the look of Girls’ Generation at the awards ceremony for the performance after they received an award, the strong makeup helped create an illusion of a sexy impression of the face creating a look with more sex appeal. However, although less reserved than Girls’ Generation, Kara also kept their knees together and their choreography was more flirty than seductive, creating a girly image with a little sex appeal. Kara shot to great fame in Japan thanks to their song “Mister” for which they wore a short t-shirt, comfortable, slightly baggy cotton pants, suspenders left down to fall around the knees, and sneakers. The fashion they chose emphasized their narrow waist and sexy hips during the song, which includes choreography where they stick out their bottoms and turn them in a circular motion many times. This was the look for the song when they were “actively working” to promote the song in Korea, and they chose to follow through with the look in Japan. Keeping the suspenders low especially added to the effect of casual sex appeal, and this was the look that Japanese celebrities imitated on TV through cosupure.



Figure 1 Girls' Generation performing a song at the 52nd Japan Record Awards.

The boy band Big Bang did not actively promote their album in Japan in 2010, yet it still received an award based on their exposure in the country through satellite and cable TV. They performed at the ceremony, too, for which they wore suits with a cool edge. Being a hip hop-based group, Big Bang's style is generally edgy and cool, but they tend to include more put together clothes such as formal jackets and slim fitting trousers in their mix of clothes. Based on their fashion, they have developed an image in Korea as a cool and edgy group that is not afraid to try very daring, different looks that may be different from the traditional baggy trousers and baseball caps worn backwards of the hip hop genre. For the award ceremony they wore black and white suits. One member, who had bleached white hair, wore a bow tie, black jacket and sunglasses, while another wore a white t-shirt under his jacket. Another member wore a black cravat for a dressy appearance on top, but looked less formal underneath with his black ankle boots coming up over his tucked in trousers. The boys offer diversity for their girl fans, too. In addition to the bleached hairstyle of one member, other members had hair that was shaved at the side but longer on top, spiky hair shooting upwards, or natural hairstyles.

Three of the members wore sunglasses even during the performance, adding to their sophisticated and fashionable image. The boy band Cho Shin Sung is a band with a trendy yet comfortable image. They usually wear what is called "semi-formal wear" in Korea, such as wearing a formal jacket over jeans, or casual wear for more comfort on stage. They wore the red concert t-shirts over black, red, or black and red pants for a segment of their very successful concert caught on camera. The pants were generally skinny or slim, and some members wore torn black jeans. Yet the expressions on their faces and body language do not really go well with the tears in their clothing, for even the boys were pictured with perfect, polite smiles on their faces and their legs close together in a well-mannered way. When Cho Shin Sung appeared on an entertainment TV program in Japan, they wore a long jacket or thin coat as outerwear, skinny or slim pants, and t-shirts underneath their jackets, with member being the exception in a black tailored vest. The colors they wore were black, gray and brown. All the members of Cho Shin Sung have hair that is dyed brown or dark blonde for a soft, natural look, and their hair was either permed or blow dried to look soft. They have different hair styles from short to a little longer, and some members wore necklaces, but the accessories were limited and they generally projected a trendy, youthful but fresh, healthy and clean image with their clothes, styling and body language (Figure 2).

The group SHINee has a look that is very different but not intimidating. It is young, fresh and feels like the most current look of youths today. SHINee is actually one of the youngest groups, with its youngest member still in high school. For their concert in Japan, they wore vivid colored pants and pastel colored pants in a skinny to slim fit, high top sneakers, colorful t-shirts with graphic prints and color blocks, and one member wore a slim denim jacket. This is typical of their style in that it is bold and daring from the perspective of the general audience, but youthful (Figure 3). For another segment of the concert they changed into an all black, skinny look, including black t-shirts, black leather jackets, black jackets and a black vest with black ankle boots. Their pants were tucked inside the boots like Big Bang. When the look is all black, more attention goes to the hairstyle, and the hairstyles of the members of SHINee were dyed, with some trendy haircuts such as short side hair and longer upper hair, some with longer hair than others and even including permed hair. They wore makeup, but only a little eye makeup for a trendy appearance, and accessories included a large necklace and a black scarf. Their colorful look was sunny, different but friendly, and their all black look was edgy, but still did not move towards scary and remained cool and approachable.



Figure 2 Cho Shin Sung making an appearance on a Japanese TV show.



Figure 3SHINEe wearing colorful looks for their concert in Japan.

While groups can have diversity through its many members, solo artists have to show different sides to the audience all alone. Park Jung-min has a good looking but clean cut image from his role in SS501, and his look as a solo artist is slim and trendy, with a tough rock and roll feel at times, and a cuter look at others. For his concert in Japan, Park Jung-min started out with a long coat with studs that showed the military style he modeled for his album cover. The look even included leather gloves, but the skinny formal pants and overall slim silhouette helped him maintain a gentlemanly side and not look too overbearingly tough. Then, he changed into a cuter version of himself, which is something many Korean singers do during concerts to be more approachable to fans and show them a more personal side. He wore a humorous t-shirt with a fake tie and heart printed, and casual jeans in an appropriately light wash, and of course, his dance included movements choreographed to look cute with the bright song (Figure 4). Park Jung-min has natural black hair that is swept to the side and just long enough to cover his eyes slightly. It is his basic hairstyle that helps him maintain the image of a gentleman and allows him to wear such different styles.

Yoon Gun is another male singer with a “gentle” image. Actually, most Korean men have this image because this is generally the image of the leading man in Korean TV drama series, but Yoon Gun especially has a gentler image than younger singers like Big Bang, for example. Yoon Gun made a public appearance in Japan for the first time in four years in 2010, and the outfit he chose to wear was a gray soft sports jacket, a blue shirt with the collar slightly up and the top button undone and the cuffs folded over the jacket, and a loosely tied brick-colored tie. His hair was short, but the sides and back were cut slightly shorter than the top, which was a big trend in 2010. The carefully calculated soft look seems to have kept the image preferred by Koreans in mind. Lastly, Lim Tae-kyung, who has a classic yet dramatic and fashionable image, wore a light gray long jacket that came down mid-thigh, a white shirt with a high standing collar with the top button undone, a gray vest and matching gray pants. The jacket was gray, but did not match the other two items. Lim Tae-kyung has long shoulder-length hair with a side parting, which contributes to his unique look. His appearance on stage in Japan was formal with a twist, and his dramatic nature was reflected in his fashion item choices.



Figure 4 Park Jung-min wearing a cute t-shirt, jeans and fabric bracelets during his concert in Japan.

Nayar stated that celebrities serve an important social purpose in that their actions generate emotional effects on the public (Nayar 2009, 5). Celebrities are in the public eye and therefore seen more than others, so even before they take any action, what they wear already starts to generate emotional effects, and there must be an emotional effect that is generated in Japanese people when they see *hallyu* singers either on TV or on stage. Upon analysis of the *hallyu* singer looks in 2010 and based on the characteristics of Japanese people and society, the following observations can be made: Korean *hallyu* singers who made appearances in Japan in 2010 presented a variety of different styles such a strong and edgy, colorful, sexy or gentlemanly. The similarities of all these looks are that first, they are very different. Second, they are cute and approachable. Third, they all have a slim silhouette. New items and styling that people have never seen before catch their eye and attention. As mentioned above, people like to see something different, and in Japan, where people live in a very visual culture, they are especially drawn to new visuals. Japan traditionally considers having a child-like heart a virtue, and is a country that likes all things cute (Richie 2003, 54).

Although *hallyu* singers presented a rocker look or sexy look at times, the looks were not strong or supported with a strong attitude and body language, so they generally looked cute, and the looks were easy to follow, too. The approachability of the looks is an important factor as it is what allows the audience to make a connection with the celebrity. The fashion of Japanese youths, or Japanese street fashion, is well-known for its exaggerated forms, combination of many colors in one look, many layers of accessories, big silhouettes and heavy makeup. Contrastingly, the styles worn by Korean singers, although they may seem exaggerated and bold in Korea, appear toned down and different but controlled in Japan. In a society that is highly visually stimulated with wild street fashion, video games, pachinkos and animations (Richie 2003, 103-149), the understated looks of *hallyu* singers are especially welcomed as they are friendly, down-to-earth and calm yet fashionable. Perhaps because the trend in 2010 internationally and especially in Korea was a slim silhouette, all the *shin-hallyu* stars wore a tight or slim silhouette. This silhouette showed off the petite frame of Korean people, adding to the cute and lovable image. The combination of the gentle and soft image of Korean people already established through Korean TV dramas, the polite smiles of *hallyu* singers, and these clothing characteristics seem to have created a formula of success in terms of appearance, in Japan.

6. Conclusion: Cute and Gentle Korean Looks in a Stimulating Japanese Society

Fashion has always been a big part of popular culture. People are interested in what stars wear, and celebrities very often start trends. Publishing Director of *Vogue* magazine Stephen Quinn said, “*Vogue* has always photographed famous people because it understands the interests its readers have in the notion of being famous and being beautiful.” The looks of people in the public eye that are welcomed by the public and start major trends ultimately reflect what we like, yearn and need, and therefore, is an important area of research for self-reflection, insight into the fashion system and discovering a basis for planning the future of fashion. *Hallyu* is a new type of popular culture. In Korea, a country that has developed rapidly both economically and technologically, fashion is falling behind, but the once lagging entertainment industry started to strive and make a mark in more recent years. The new type of *shin-hallyu*, focusing on young Korean singers branching out overseas, is especially successful, and understanding elements of its success can aid further success of *hallyu* stars, and the Korean fashion and entertainment industries. Certain cities are now some of the strongest and longest-established of global brands. This is why some products that include “Paris” or “5th Avenue” in their names were actually not designed or made in the city, but simply use the image of the city or place to create certain image and atmosphere for the product.

For example, Paris is considered a center of fashion consumption and Times Square is a symbol of the “happening” and commercial city, New York (Gilbert 2000, 9-10). Korea has not yet established itself as a brand, especially in terms of fashion, but the government is making efforts to develop the fashion industry, and understanding the unique characteristics of *hallyu* fashion that are well accepted by the world could help clarify a good strategic direction for establishment of the brand of Seoul. Analysis of the fashion of *hallyu* singers in Japan in 2010 shows that they wore tight or slim silhouettes, and a variety of different colors and styles. Individuals with different hair styles and clothing styles were especially intentionally included in groups to secure a wide range of fans, and solo artists changed their looks completely at times to show different sides of their personality. However, the styles of *hallyu* singers did not gain popularity for their diverse and extreme styles. The uniqueness of the looks, the cute and approachable aspect, and slim silhouettes were the key factors. Styles they had never seen before stimulated the curiosity of Japanese people who belong to a very visual society. The looks that were cute and more controlled than Japanese looks in terms of color and details were found to be approachable, and they were easy to copy, too.

The slim silhouette trend-conscious *hallyu* singers wore on stage came across as young and fresh, and simultaneously showed off the small physique of Korean people, adding to the cuteness factor. Just as the image of Korean men portrayed in TV dramas automatically established a gentle and kind image for Korean singers, too, it is now an appropriate time to use the influence of *hallyu* stars to create and establish a strong impression about Korean fashion. When *hallyu* singers advance to other countries in the future, including Europe and the United States, as they have already started to, they will not have to directly show people their Korean personalities by wearing the Korean flag, for example, but will be able to relay a Korean feel through their unique, understated, slim and modern styles, based on the understanding gained through this article. The Korean fashion and entertainment industries should also keep the characteristics of successful *hallyu* singer styles in mind when planning advancements to the international market in the future.

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