Korean Pop Culture Conference
Saturday, December 6, 2008

Presented by the students in East Asian Studies 217
Smith College, Fall 2008

Sponsored by the East Asian Studies Program
Love, Marriage, and Tradition
Faculty Moderator: Professor Marnie Anderson

This panel seeks to understand the changing ideas and meanings of love, marriage, weddings, and tradition. This panel will explore how television dramas and films highlight the tension between tradition and modern. We are especially interested in the ways in which the media portrays match-making and arranged marriages in modern Korean society.

Traditional Fusion
Jeanju Choi, Smith College ‘12

The Korean people have always taken much pride in their history; thus naturally, historical Korean dramas have become a major part of “Hallyu” (Korean Wave). While the standard historical dramas (sageuk) are still popular ways to narrate history, fusion historical dramas have also become very popular. The traditional historical drama attempts to strictly replicate aspects of Korean history, such as mannerisms, speech, and dress. Fusion historical dramas, as the name implies, incorporate modern aspects of society. I will compare *Jumong*, a more typical historical television drama, and *Hong Gil Dong*, a fusion historical drama, to see how these two types of dramas retell Korean history similarly or differently.

Traditional and Contemporary Weddings in South Korea
Yanjie Li, Smith College ‘09

My topic will focus on traditional and contemporary weddings in South Korea. With economic development and modernization, South Koreans have adapted various new forms of marriage ceremonies into their traditional ways. What has been kept and what has been abandoned in these ceremonies? In this paper, I will compare traditional weddings to contemporary weddings and the different meanings they produce.

Professional Match-Making: Existence in Real Life Compared to Portrayals in Film
Joydita Sarkar, Smith College ‘12

How has contemporary match-making changed from its traditional form? Are the portrayals of match-making in contemporary Korean television dramas and films an accurate portrayal of modern society? How do the two perspectives compare? I search for answers to these questions through observations of popular Korean films and TV dramas, the study of statistics and cultural traditions concerning modern arranged marriage and match-making practices in Korea. It is important to know if modern marriage habits are indeed changing in Korea because of the possible results of such change which will ultimately affect the newest generation. Thus far there has not been much research on the effect of media on marriage practices. The material that does exist on present-day marriage practices in Korea often focus on the prevalence of love marriages and do not consider Korean popular culture to be a major proponent of changes in common marriage practices.
Out of the Dark: Shining Light on Homosexuality in Korean Pop Culture
Faculty Moderator: Professor Kim Kono

Our panel aims to look at the growing openness to homosexuality in contemporary Korean media. We will analyze recent films and television dramas to examine the portrayal of homosexual characters. The focus will also be on the causes for the recent changes, including the growing consumer market. The overarching question for this panel is: Is Korea ready to open up to homosexuality?

Korean Media and its Recent Attempts to Portray Homosexuality
Hae Eon Lee, Mount Holyoke College ‘11

Homosexuality is a rare and sensitive topic in Korean popular culture. For a long time, the representation of homosexuality in Korean cinema and television was highly limited and kept in the dark. However, recent evidence has shown that Korean popular culture is taking the next step and opening up to homosexuality. This paper seeks to point out some of the noticeable changes in the representation of homosexuality in cinema and television over the last few years. This paper will also touch on the reasons for the recent growth in queer media. Through critical analysis, this paper will validate how certain cultures, such as fan culture, and their expansion as a popular culture is creating a consumer body for the Korean queer media. However, even with all these changes, the reality for homosexuals in Korea is still far from ideal. Recent suicides of known homosexual celebrities reflect this irony. This paper therefore concludes with exploring the reality for Korean homosexuals and the contradictions they face.

Homosexuality in Korean Television and Film: Acceptance, Tolerance, or Rejection?
Lauren Kayes, Smith College ‘11

For my conference paper, I will address how homosexuality is portrayed in Korean dramas and movies. More specifically, I want to look at whether the issue of homosexuality is ever directly addressed as a serious topic, or if it is used more as comic relief; whether it is more often portrayed in a positive or negative light; and how often it is portrayed in mainstream television and movies. I plan to study how homosexual characters and references are treated in specific dramas and films and read critics’ reviews and reactions to these media. A few of the primary texts I plan to look at are Coffee Prince, No Regret, and The King and the Clown.
Our panel seeks to locate the notions of ideal beauty in contemporary Korean society by asking what is considered beautiful, who fulfills these standards, and how they are made. Through the exploration of the star (idol) making system, plastic surgery industry, and beauty as depicted in Korean manhwa, our panel shows that although these forms are different, they have a uniting ideal which has formidable influence on the way Korean people think about beauty.

**Paper Myths: Beauty in Manhwa**  
**Elizabeth Hillis, Smith College ‘12**

My paper will focus on the effects of manhwa on the Korean beauty ideal of women. Does manhwa have a specific female beauty ideal? Does this differ between male and female artists? Does it affect Koreans and, if so, how? Through my reading of manhwa by both male and female artists (Goong, June, Daring Students’ Association, 0/6, Let’s Be Perverts, and Bride of the Water God), as well as art books (Comic Artists-Asia and Manhwa Maina) and essays on comics and comic characters, I will find the answers to these questions and some others. These findings are valid to people interested in the Korean beauty/fashion scene as they will divulge manhwa’s effect on the beauty industry. Through artistic analysis and exploration, my work has revealed that manhwa has not had much of an effect on the beauty ideals, but takes cues from the beauty ideals of Korea and then expands them to re-influence the ideals of beauty in Korea and, sometimes, around the world. This means that manhwa takes beauty, reworks it, and remarkets it.

**Idol Stars’ Great Impact on the Masses**  
**Joanne Yang, Smith College ‘12**

This paper is about the idol star system: mostly about its effects on the audience. Idol Star system has been dormant for about a decade, but four years ago, this strategy was reintroduced whereby playing an even larger role than before. This is an important issue because the Korean media rotates around this idol star system. Having read books, many articles, and blog posts, I tackled down the questions of why the idol star system is in use, why idols are so popular, and how they affect the masses. I will show the differences between the first generation and second generation idol groups and argue that the latter group influences more age groups through their humanistic personalities, fashion, music, and familiarity. I have come to the conclusion that the idol groups are moving away from the negative connotations of singers/idol stars and are being accepted by the audience, not just as entertainers but also as “families.” This changed role of the idol system is not only affecting our entertainment, but also affecting the society in areas of fashion styles, gossip, ideals, and expectations.

**Seeing Double: Double Eyelid Surgery in Korea**  
**Catherine Hannula, Mount Holyoke College ‘11**

쌍꺼풀 수술’s (double eyelid surgery) has a seemingly large prevalence in Korean popular culture. This paper seeks to clarify who is receiving the surgery, their motivations, and the cultural repercussions of the surgery by attempting to prove that a significant majority of Korea’s population is receiving it to attain beauty and financial security. This paper also attempts to explore how much of a role foreign influence has played into this trend while examining on a larger scale the effect this surgery will have on Korea for years to come.
International Success?: Fashion, Nostalgia, and the American Dream
Faculty Moderator: Professor Jina Kim

This panel will be concerned with the different influences of the Korean Wave (hallyu) in China, Japan, and the U.S. We will investigate the popularity of “Korean style” in China; the influx of Korean dramas in Japan and their followings by Japanese female audiences; Korean pop musicians’ relationship to American pop culture. We will explore to what extent Korean popular culture has become influential outside the Korean peninsula and what this means for cross-cultural understanding and international relations.

“Korean Style” in China
Kailin Weng, Smith College ‘12

China is always proud of its unique traditional apparel. However, during the Westernization at the end of the 20th Century, Western style apparels came into popular demand. In the 21st Century, along with the wave of Korean popular culture, Korean style youth clothing has become extremely popular in China, especially among young women. It has taken over the mainstream of the Western and traditional Chinese style apparels, and has become a new symbol of modern fashion in China. I will explore the impact of the Korean Wave on China, will attempt to define the term “Korean Style” in China, and analyze the growing popularity of the “Korean Style” apparels. My survey results show that because of globalization Korean fashion and Western fashion has collapsed together, and what is called “Korean Style” isn’t significantly different from what we call Western styles. I conclude that “Korean style” is simply a name given to describe modern fashion by young enthusiastic Chinese to follow.

A Nostalgia Spanning Generations and Nations
Haruka Kuga, Smith College ‘09

This is a study pertaining more closely to the ways in which Japanese consumers, both young and old, derive pleasure from viewing the Korean drama. Focusing on the ways in which Japan views itself in conjunction with Korea, this will then be a study which considers the positive response towards Korean dramas in Japan as a way to address the past in correspondence with the future, using longer studied discourses concerning Japan’s displaced identity in Asia and the West. Through blogs and interviews, I have based my research on a few case studies within the 20+ and 30-50+ ranges. The younger division reveals markedly different but corroborating results. The older generations find themselves reminiscing while watching Korean dramas. They are faced with a sense of nostalgia for a past unknown to younger generations. Instead, the latter cling onto hopefulness and an optimism that has not yet lost its luster. Their love for dramas is based on an attraction to the new and different. Although the definition and level of pleasure can vary between viewers, themes of nostalgia and associations with the past remain prevalent and directly correspond with themes of optimism for the future of the youth.

East Meets West: Korean Pop Idols Redefining Black Popular Culture
Keri Moore, Smith College ‘09

This essay will examine Korean artists’ transition into American pop culture and their ability to incorporate American pop culture into their own style. This essay will analyze African-American artists like Usher, the music style, and genre, in order to pinpoint how it has influenced many successful Korean artists. In addition, this essay will show how there are Korean artists like Seo Taiji who extract their success from American mainstream rap artists without indexing where he receives his inspiration, while demonstrating American style music lost in transition to other cultures. What’s more, this essay will compare the differences between Black popular culture and Korean popular culture to shed light on the idea that Korean artists’ success has been influenced by American mainstream artists like Usher, but not entirely. This essay will then demonstrate Koreans who redefine American music by adapting the musical genre to meet their own cultural style and needs.