

## Chapter 5

# Public Discourses on the Korean Wave in Taiwan

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### ABSTRACT

*Recently, Korean dramas have won popularity in East Asia and provoked public discussions in newspaper forums in Taiwan. This chapter analyzes how the interpretive communities have formed their interpretive frameworks, what they have conceived from the Korean Wave and what policy implications have been drawn. According to the analysis, the dominant discourse is economic nationalism – while Korea has become a developed country, Taiwan should learn from Korea and catch up in this global competition. Imbedded in internal politics, different interpretative communities have learned different lessons from Korea. The pro-unification (with China) camp claimed that Taiwan should reduce local colors and open trade with China. The pro-(Taiwan) independence camp claimed that Taiwan should enhance national identity. The media reform group claimed that Taiwan should establish a strong public service broadcaster like the Korean counterparts. Based on this study, this chapter suggests that public discourses should address media problems in order to enhance communication at home and abroad.*

### INTRODUCTION

The spread of the Korean Wave has caught the attention of the press in Taiwan. The term “Korean Wave” was coined by the media to describe the popularity of Korea dramas in East Asia (Yang, 2008). In Taiwan, after Korean dramas enjoyed high ratings, discussions about the Korean Wave

emerged in newspaper forums. The discussants tried to derive meanings from the Wave and draw implications that concern Taiwan.

The dominant discourse is economic nationalism. That is, to the discussants, Korea and Taiwan were once members of the Four Little Tigers (the newly industrializing countries in Asia) together. Yet, Korea has demonstrated itself as a leading country in the culture industry, while Taiwan has

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been lagging behind and should learn from Korea in order to survive in this global competition.

However, imbedded in Taiwan's internal politics, different groups focus on different discourses and have learned different lessons from the Wave. They expressed different viewpoints in policy debates. In 2003, the government proposed to mandate terrestrial broadcasters to televise domestic programs during primetime, claiming that this is a lesson learned from Korea to boost local productions. This proposal was described by the media as an attempt to ban foreign programs including Korean dramas (Kao, January 11, 2006). In the policy debates, different groups, based on different discourses, expressed their perceived pros and cons.

The pan-blue camp, based on the discourse of economic (Chinese) nationalism, attacked the ban. This camp consists of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and related factions. After World War II, the KMT ruled Taiwan and imposed Chinese nationalism. Because of historical legacy, the pan-blue camp prefers unification with China to Taiwan independence (Chu and Lin, 2001; Chang, 2005). The pan-blue camp attacked the ban, claiming that, while Korean cultural products have transcended cultural differences, Taiwan should overcome "parochial" character and open up to the world, including China.

The pan-green camp, based on the discourse of economic (Taiwanese) nationalism, supported the ban. This camp consists of the Democratic People's Party (the DPP) and related factions. To challenge KMT's authoritarian rule, the DPP argued for the strengthening of Taiwanese identity (Chu and Lin, 2001; Chang, 2005). The pan-green camp claimed that as Korea has taken protection measures, Taiwan should also protect and support a culture industry that reflects Taiwan's own culture.

The other two discourses are not related to nationalism, but to the ideology concerning media policy. The media reform group, focused on the discourse of public intervention, supported the ban. Based on the belief that the media should play a

role of public service in society, they have been concerned about solving the malaise in the media system after deregulation. To achieve this goal, they argued that Taiwan should follow Korea in adopting more public interventions. By contrast, the media industries focused on the discourse of *laissez-faire*. They argued that while Korea and other countries have been adopting de-regulation measures, further interventions would distort the market mechanism and affect the survival of domestic industries.

The above discourses can be read in newspaper forums. In Taiwan's political transition, the press has become implicitly partisan, paralleling to the ideologies in the political arena (Feng, 2003). The *United Daily* (*the UD*) has been aligned with the pan-blue camp, the *Liberty Times* (*the LT*), with the pan-green one. Another newspaper, the *Apple Daily* (*the AD*), launched by a Hong Kong newspaper group in 2003, is market-driven. The media reform group has delivered their ideas in all newspapers.

Thus, in drawing the meanings of the Korean Wave, different interpretive communities have formed. According to Fish (1980: 172-173), readers of certain cultural contexts would develop certain interpretive strategies and derive certain meanings from the texts. In this case, in newspaper forums, different interpretive communities have formed different interpretive strategies and derived different meanings from the Korean Wave.

This chapter aims to explore how different interpretive communities have formed their interpretive frameworks, what they conceived from the Korean Wave and what policy implications were drawn. In doing so, this chapter hopes to illuminate the public discourses in the wider contexts of political and inter-cultural communication.

## BACKGROUND

The Korean Wave has fuelled research interest among the academia. Three analytical approaches

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