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<td><strong>Author(s)</strong></td>
<td>Kang, Hyeon Dew.; Kim, Sewon.</td>
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Japanese Cultural Imperialism:
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By

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JAPANESE CULTURAL IMPERIALISM:
THE IMPACT OF JAPANESE DIRECT BROADCASTING BY SATELLITE
ON KOREAN CULTURE

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Submitted to
The International Association for Mass Communications Research
Yugoslavia
Aug. 26 - 31

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Japanese Cultural Imperialism: 
The Impact of Japanese Direct Broadcasting by Satellite on Korean Culture

by Hyeon Dew Kang and Sewon Kim

There have recently been increasing concerns over legal, political and cultural effects of Direct Broadcasting by Satellite (DBS) among international communication scholars. What has stimulated the increasing concerns and debates among scholars is the gradual use of DBS by television networks internationally and across national boundaries without the prior consent of the receivers, that results in the unwanted reception of foreign programming.1 Whether the spillover is intentional or unintentional, the intrusion of foreign television programs threatens national sovereignty, blurs cultural identity by colonizing the mind of people, and further establishes a basis for economic domination in a receiving nation. As Armand Mattelart has observed, information, communications and culture have progressively become the centre of international debate, and have altered geopolitical conceptions not only by creating new political and economic liens, but by also creating new relationships of power.2

The issue of spillover television programs by DBS is more at stake when we look at the current situation of Korean peninsula that locates within the reach of the Japanese DBS. The geographical proximity as well as the historical relationship between Korea and Japan urge an investigation of the issue of spillover, that would

reveal some implications different from a group of studies done in European countries or in Canada. Korea had been occupied by Japan from 1910 to 1945. Though it has been forty five years since 36-year Japanese Occupation ended, the bequest of Japanese cultural elements still permeates in cultural sectors in Korea. Not only the bequest, but also Japanese cultural materials have been infiltrated into Korea unlimitedly by either formal ways or underground routes. As a result, it is hard to find non-Japanese influence on Koreans' living these days; from daily necessities to decadent cultural materials. Japanese cultural influence is prominent particularly in Korean mass media. Television programs as well as the mode of production and programming follow similar format to those of Japan. Japanese books occupy more than 60% and Japanese magazines occupy about 85% of imported books and magazines. Japanese popular songs inundate in Japanese style sing-along bars and their music videos are frequently viewed in cafes around campus towns. And Japanese films will soon be imported to Korea as the result of numerous attempts by the Japanese government to open up Korean film market since 1970s.

Though Japanese cultural elements permeates in Korean living, Korean people in general still feel anti-Japanese sentiments and worry over such inundation of cultural products of Japan, that was once a suzerain state. Despite such feelings and anxiety of Korean people, Japanese government has continuously attempted to have cultural exchange with Korea since 1965, when Japanese and Korean governments made "an agreement on cultural treasures and cultural collaboration." The agreement was made in order to "collaborate for the promotion of cultural relationship as possible as they can." Since then, Japanese government has more actively requested Korean government to open up a door for cultural exchange. As
a consequence, in 1981, the two government agreed with an establishment of "the fund for cultural exchange." Upon the agreement, Korean government set up "fund for Korean-Japanese cultural exchange," while Japanese government set up "fund for Japanese-Korean cultural exchange" in 1984. Also in 1983, after the Japanese Prime Minister's visit to Korea, the two governments agreed with "economic relationship as well as cultural exchange" through Foreign Ministers' Conference and other ministerial meetings. In 1984, the Japanese Foreign Minister visited Korea and suggested an idea of establishing "Committee of Japan-Korea Cultural Exchange," with an intent to give a shape to the plan when the President of Korea visits to Japan.

The idea of cultural exchange suggested by Japanese government seems to regard cultural exchange as a part of foreign relationship and as an aid to economic relationship. But, the real motif behind the Japanese government's tenacious attempts to request for cultural exchange is more than setting up "foreign and economic relationship." It is explicit in a report of an advisory committee of Japanese Foreign Ministry on "publicity and cultural activity." The report states:

"... it is indispensable to maintain and promote mutual understanding between nations. In this context, publicity and cultural activities are a part of total security of a nation along with collaboration for defense and economics... Thus, it is imperative to support publicity and cultural activities considering the significance of the security of the two nations in the long run."

The statement indicates that Japanese government's attempt for cultural exchange could be understood as a part of total security that covers defense and economic collaboration. But, what underlies behind this phrase is that Japan wants to secure imperialist economics and military invasion via cultural intrusion, through that it could safely acquire interests of its monopolistic capital. Thus, Japanese
cultural intrusion may not be limited to only "cultural." Rather it is a bridging point that connects economic invasion, and that ultimately leads Korea to be protected by Japanese military power.

The series of attempts by Japanese government for cultural exchange now sees a fruitful result in part by television programs of DBS. Developed by the joint effort of the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunication and NHK since 1973, Japan launched the experimental medium-scale broadcast satellite, BSE, in 1978, and the BS-2 series which were the first operational satellites. By the BS-2 series that were licensed to JCSAT and SCC (Space Communication Company), Japan started television broadcasting since August, 1989. JCSAT is owned by C. Itoh (40%), Mitsui (30%) and Hughes from U. S. (30%), and SCC is an entirely Japanese venture controlled by Mitsubishi. The DBS of Japan has now two channels for television broadcasting; one for a mixture of programs obtained from the General and Educational Channels of NHK, and the other for a 24 hour channel devoted to world/international news. In 1991, DBS of Japan will have one more channel for commercial television programs controlled by JSB (Japanese Satellite Broadcasting) via BS-3. In addition, Japan intends to make every effort possible to popularize satellite broadcasting and to include remote islands 1,000 Km away from the mainland within the range of reception, so as to increase the number of households able to receive satellite broadcasting services. South Korea is of course within the range of reception of Japanese satellite broadcasting services.

The fact that Korean people could receive television programs of the Japanese DBS caused great consternation to the Korean government authorities. The South Korean press also reacted strongly against the proposed the Japanese DBS, terming it "cultural aggression" and deploring the fact that the Japanese had
not first consulted with the South Korean authorities. Despite such concerns, there has been little practical action against the spillover of television broadcasting of the Japanese DBS. The only governmental action on the side of Korea was to prohibit the importation of satellite dishes, tuners and related goods. When U.S.-Korea trade conflict became serious, the Korean government cancel the prohibition in 1989. Some lamented that the Korean government should have at least restrict the importation of satellite dishes and related goods at that time.

Geographical proximity between Japan and Korea inevitably allows Koreans to receive the spillover of Japanese television programs provided by DBS if Korean households set up a satellite dish and related goods. According to an analysis of one-day programs of DBS, one channel (Channel 15) devoted to world/international news fed by Intelsat from the U.S.A., news fed from Super Channel and the BBC, business information, Tokyo stock market news, and sports programs. News and information occupy 47.6% (11 hours and 25 min.) of the total programming, and sports and news for Tokyo stock market occupy 31.9% (7 hours and 40 min.) and 16.3% (1 hour) respectively. The rest is occupied by travel information. Among news programs, news related to U.S. and Europe occupy 61.5% (14 hours and 45 min.) while news about Japan and Asia occupy 34% (8 hours and 10 min.) and 4.5% (1 hour 5 min.) respectively.

Thus, the first channel of the Japanese DBS primarily delivers U.S. and European news, and the the rest is devoted to news about Japan. News around Asian area occupies only an hour and news around socialist countries occupies relatively little. There are hardly news programs dealing with socialist countries

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except for that received from U.S.S.R. or China. This demonstrates a formula that one-way flow of information distributed by Western press is redistributed by the Japanese DBS. Further, it is ironical that the dominant ideology of Japan that advocates cosmopolitanism delivers the re-distributed information order of capitalist powers. Hence, for Korean receivers, Japan functions as a gatekeeper controlling the flow of information for its own interest. And, Korean people face to receive the spillover programs screened out through a dual structure of information flow—Japan as a gatekeeper and as an ex-suzerain state.

The other channel (Channel 11) offers a mixture of programs from the General and Educational Channel of NHK. This channel follows a similar programming to that of Korean televisions. It consists of "Morning Information and News Hours," programs targeting housewives such as "Home Journal" and "Housewives' Encyclopedia," songs and televised novels, and sports games in the morning. In the evening, it offers news, movies, and hobby programs or educational programs. As compared to Korean broadcasting that broadcast only 11 hours during weekdays and 18 hours on Saturdays and Sundays, the 24 hour broadcasting of the Japanese DBS would create a new group of Korean audience in daytime or late night.

The spillover of such DBS programs into Korea brings about a variety of cultural as well as economic concerns. One possible audience group, especially in the daytime broadcasting, would be housewives who are major consumers. The encroachment on such audience group would become more serious when it starts commercial broadcasting in 1991, because the advertisements of Japanese goods would affect housewives first, and then Korean domestic market, and thus propagate Japanization of Korean living. The other possible new audience group is
adolescents. The increasing familiarity of Japanese pop stars and actors and actresses of Korean adolescents would formulate a consumptive mood for Japanese cultural products. If a television drama or news programs contribute to reproduce dominant ideology and to repress alternative cultural values and beliefs, the intrusion of the Japanese broadcasting into Korea means unregulated infiltration of Japanese dominant ideology into Korea. Moreover, daily exposure to Japanese television programs increases the degree of familiarity with Japanese goods and cultural materials among Koreans, and that would contribute to set up a stepping stone for Japanese cultural and economic imperialism.

What propels the reception of DBS of Japan is newly increasing promotion of satellite dishes and related goods in Korea. As DBS began, several electronic businesses in Korea started newspaper ads:

"Satellite dishes will provide you with 24 hour continuous broadcasting that consists of the world news and the world economic trend, that hold the global village together, a variety of cultural events such as operas, ballets, and concerts, major sports events, and world classic movies and Japanese films with no-cuts..."4

The cost of satellite dishes and related goods was about US $3,000 to 4,500 a few years ago, but it costs only about U. S. $1,200 these days, almost the price of a big-size color television set. The cost becomes diminishing as time goes and becomes more available inexpensively by setting up a dish for a community or an apartment complex basis. The low price, the recent promotion competition in electronic market and increasing community dishes will promote nationalization of satellite dishes in Korea sooner than expected. At present, recipients of the Japanese DBS in Korea are about 200 thousand.

While the number of recipient increases, the response of the recipients shows that the spillover of DBS needs to be regulated. According to the study done by Lee and Bitterman,5 17.8% of receivers think that the television programs of the Japanese DBS should be actively regulated, while 66% think that it should be regulated case by case. In other words, 83.3% of respondents think that it needs to be regulated in general. Only 16.1% responded that it does not need to be regulated. As for the cultural aspects of DBS, 25.9% of respondents worry that the Japanese DBS would harm cultural identity of Korean people. 65.9% of respondents say that it is up to recipients' attitudes. This suggests that 91.8% of Korean viewers think that the Japanese DBS would harm cultural identity, though it is more or less up to the attitudes of recipients. Only 7.3% respond that it would contribute to the development of cultural sectors in Korea.

A recent study of Korean audience's viewing behavior of the Japanese DBS provides what kinds of opinions Korean audience has over television programs offered by the Japanese DBS.6 In general, male audience occupies the Japanese DBS viewers than female, and average viewing hours is 2 hours and 11 minute a day. People who have professional jobs occupy 39% of the total audience; and as they are inclined to view more the Japanese DBS programs, they are inclined to view less Korean domestic television programs. The viewers think that they watch television programs of the Japanese DBS in order to expose the recent news and information (45.5%), to learn foreign language (20%), and to expose more

6An, Sooguen, "A Study on Korean Audience's Viewing Behavior of Japanese DBS," presented to Korean Broadcasting Conference, 1989, November. This study was done in the city of Pusan, the second big city in Korea located in the south part of the Korean peninsula.
programs due to 24 hours broadcasting (17.3%). Viewers with professional jobs are more inclined to expose news and information programs, while businessmen and housewives prefer the 24 hour broadcasting itself. Respondents hope that domestic television stations broadcast for 24 hours a day. As for the danger of the spillover programs, 40.9% of respondents worry that our culture can be invaded and destroyed by the Japanese DBS, and 21.8% hesitate to view the programs for fear of being observed by other people. Only 20.8% of respondents are disappointed by the limited choice of the DBS programs. Nevertheless, 53.6% of the respondents answered that they would urge friends or relatives to view those programs.

Although a part of Korean population enjoy the spillover of the Japanese DBS, it can never be called “cultural exchange,” but only a form of cultural imperialism not consented by its recipients. In the age of DBS, the issue of spillover of DBS needs to be reconsidered because it threatens the autonomy of national culture more than terrestrial radio or television broadcasting has done. As Kang (1989) states,

Japanese mass culture is infiltrating our home by DBS. The Japanese DBS is the most threatening cultural weapon that sends the Japanese television programs directly to Korean households, without any relaying devices. Under such circumstances, the autonomy of a nation or of a national culture would be completely defenseless.7

Furthermore, the impact of the Japanese DBS on Korean people is more an issue of politics than of a simple spillover. The role of Japan as a gatekeeper for choosing and sending world news and as an ex-suzerain state of Korea add one

more layer to the significance of the spillover programs. As discussed above, Japan's continuous efforts for cultural exchange with Korea ultimately aims to political domination over Korean peninsula, and DBS has made an easy road for that by gatekeeping world news and information and by propagating Japanese cultural products. Thus, the impact of the Japanese DBS on Korean audience is beyond the issue of spillover discussed in most studies done for the situation of Europe—benefits such as mutual interests—and Canada—the issue of one-way flow of information. It is more a political issue in the Korean case, that might cause another era of foreign occupation.

Then, what kind of suggestions can be made for the situation of Korea, after the Korean government failed to restrict the importation of satellite dishes to domestic market? There can be several possible ways to encounter the danger of the impact of the Japanese DBS. First and foremost, as the United Nations General Assembly endorsed a resolution in 1982, it is necessary for Japan to make an effort to negotiate an international agreement and to obtain prior consent on the issue of spillover with Korea. The need for prior consent is suggested by U. S. Secretary of State Rogers,

... perhaps it is the time for the international community to begin moving towards consensus that nations have a right to be consulted before actions are taken which could affect their environment or the international environment at large. This implies, of course, that nations contemplating such actions would be expected to consult in advance other states which would be affected.\(^8\)

Second, it is important to set up a regular meeting between Japan and Korea for a joint monitoring system and actively participate in such cooperative effort to lessen

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the degree of danger of the spillover television programs. Third, it is necessary for the Japanese DBS to cultivate quality programs containing high cultural products to the extent that cultural intrusion itself can contribute to development of Korean culture. Fourth, it is imperative for Korean television broadcasting companies to cultivate quality programs as an alternative in order to compete with programs of the Japanese DBS. Fifth, it is urgent to have media education for general audience, that could raise the consciousness of Korean people over the issue of the importance of national culture. Lastly, for the joint cooperation, it is desirable for Japan to move towards cosmopolitanism breaking up its own ethnocentrism, while it is urgent for Korean people to recover from chauvinism that is a result of the past occupation period.