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From Diaspora TV to Social Media: Korean TV Dramas in America

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Korean TV dramas debuted on the airwaves of the U.S. in 1975, exclusively for overseas Korean communities in an entry-port city, Los Angeles. They then began circulating through two Korean diasporic media outlets: Korean-language TV stations and video rental stores. The latter were in Koreatowns in major metropolitan cities, such as Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Washington D.C., and Atlanta. This well-maintained, two-channel system has, however, considerably frayed in the new millennium as U.S. consumption patterns of Korean dramas expeditiously migrate toward video streaming websites like YouTube, Hulu, and Netflix, and online-based fan communities whose ethnic identity is not necessarily Korean. Since the early 2000s, myriad illegal web services and social media networks have provided, shared, and disseminated Korean TV dramas, along with K-pop, to the mainstream users/viewers in the United States that eventually resulted in the first legitimate video streaming service DramaFever.com. The aim of this chapter is to historicize and analyze the distribution, circulation, and reception of Korean TV dramas in the United States, from diasporic TV, exclusively for Korean immigrants, to the mainstream media market, in the age of social media.

Korean immigrants in the United States were quintessential post-1965 settlers, along with Vietnamese, Indian, and other Southeast-Asian refugees. This was when the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 eliminated the nation-origin quota system based on race that was the basis for American immigration policy since the 1920s. The law, instead, focused on immigrants' skills and family relationships with citizens or permanent residents.[1] These new "post-1965" communities have therefore exceedingly disparate political and social agendas from the preceding groups from Asia: the Japanese and Chinese. Korean immigrants also stand apart as they are—markedly, for the first generation—maintaining their "imagined community" within American society. Almost all post-1965 Korean immigrants departed from Korea, a culturally homogeneous society. They speak only one language, and do not have indicative regional characteristics in customs and food habits. This largely monolingual/monocultural background of Korean immigrants gives them an advantage over other multilingual immigrants groups for retaining their ethnic attachment.

As Korean immigrants strive to get settled, however, they find themselves in paradoxical situations. They have voluntarily left their old homeland but remain emotionally attached to it; they aspire to become a part of their new "home," but are

blocked by language and cultural barriers like many other immigrants from Asia (Zhou and Cai 2002, 423). In light of this, Korean-language newspapers played a vital role in the immigrants' lives during the 1970s and 1980s. Hurh Won-moo and Kim Kwang-chun studied the adaptation patterns of Korean immigrants in Los Angeles. Throughout their in-person interviews with 622 people, they noted that 78% of respondents subscribed to Korean-language newspapers. Nearly half of the respondents did not read American newspapers at all (Hurh and Kim, 1984). Therefore, ironically, to acquire the information and assimilate to the host society, Korean immigrants relied on the Korean diasporic media outlets. The oldest Korean language newspaper in the United States is Hankook Ilbo (*Han'guk Ilbo*), established in 1969 in Los Angeles. All other newspapers duplicated stories originating from Seoul, with local news added here in the United States. As Yu Eui-young argues, "They constantly reinforce traditional values and nationalism. They are either pro- or anti-Korean government and community based autonomous papers are rare." He added, "Korean television broadcasts in LA similarly reinforce traditional values and Korean nationalism. Broadcasts start with the Korean national anthem and Korean news and their main features are dramas and comedies produced in Seoul" (Yu, 1983: 39). Korean-language TV stations in the United States began airing imported "homeland" television dramas, news, and entertainment programs as early as 1975, but it was not until 1983 that the community embraced a full-fledged Korean-language television station in the U.S. cable network system.

The Emergence of Diaspora TV

Hamid Naficy (1993), while examining Iranian exiles and their media in Los Angeles, suggests there are three types of minority TV in the United States: ethnic, transnational, and exile TV. Ethnic TV refers to television programs primarily produced in the host country by long-established indigenous minorities, such as Black Entertainment Television (BET). Exilic TV is produced "by exiles living in the host country as a response to and in parallel with their own transitional and provisional status" (62). Television programs produced by Iranians, Arabs, and Armenians fall within this category. His last category, transnational TV, is operated by products imported from the homeland. Korean, Japanese, Chinese, and Vietnamese programs, and Spanish-language national networks like Univision and Telemundo, fit this category (62-63). A decade after his initial theorization, Naficy (2003) revised and updated this last category by replacing "exilic TV" with "diaspora TV." In his new definition, diaspora TV programs are made "usually by local, independent, minority entrepreneurs for consumption by a small cohesive population which, because of its diaspora status, is cosmopolitan, multicultural, and multilingual" (53). In this context, Naficy is still referring to Iranian-, Arabic-, and Armenian-language TV stations that belong to a "decentralized global narrowcasting" as opposed to multi/transnational media conglomerates-driven "centralized global broadcasting" such as AP (Associate Press) or CNN (Cable News Network).

Naficy's grouping of "transnational TV," however, does not suit all diasporic experiences. For example, Stuart Cunningham and Tina Nguyen (2000 and 2003) show that for most Vietnamese in North America and Australia, the concept of "home" is a denied category, while "the regime" continues in power, and how sophisticated video programs produced by the Vietnamese diasporic communities are exported back to Vietnam. Adding to this, Chinese-language TV complicates notions of "home," "exile,"

and "diaspora," as Chinese diasporas are composed of three significantly different demographics—those originating from People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan—and their cultural interests and investments reflect this diversity (Sinclair et al 2000; Zhu 2009). Halleh Ghorashi argues that diasporic understanding of homeland signifies "not a place to return to but rather a domain or an idea that serves as one of the available discourses within the present negotiation of identity" (2003, 133) and, from this point of view, Chinese-language TV stations in the United States have been transforming their cultural, political, and ideological identities since the early 1980s.

The case of Korean-language TV is another conspicuous counterexample of Naficy's model. SRI-Gallup Organization for the International Channel Network reported in the early 1990s, according to Naficy, that the channel's Chinese, Korean and Japanese viewers "by far prefer programming produced in their native homeland over programming produced in their host country" (2003, 52). His definition of transnational TV is mostly based on this statement but is only appropriate if we consider the early phase of Korean-language TV stations in Los Angeles. Naficy wrote that the Korean-language broadcasts in the United States are produced by Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) in Korea, a government-controlled body, and imported and distributed for broadcast in the United States by the Korean-government owned Korean Television Enterprises (KTE). As a result of such outside assistance, Korean producers of both TV and radio enjoyed a degree of stability and security that "producers of diaspora television can only dream about" (52).

On the contrary, and countering Naficy's argument, most Korean-language TV stations, other than KTE, were launched by local, independent, minority entrepreneurs and they have been producing a significant portion of local news, talk shows, documentaries, home shopping shows, and even comedy programs at their own studios in both English and Korean—although most television content watched by Korean immigrants still remains "transnational." Having started as transnational TV, Korean-language channels have gradually transformed to diaspora TV by increasing the number of locally produced programs. Accordingly, this chapter refers to Korean-language broadcasts in the United States as "diaspora TV," which includes elements of both the "diasporic" and the "transnational," and whose identity has been in constant flux.

The formation of the first Korean diaspora TV station in Los Angeles was, as discussed above, not fostered by the producers in the host country, but by the homeland's KBS. Korean Television Enterprises (KTE), owned by KBS, was inaugurated in Los Angeles on July 1, 1983. Prior to this, two locally-financed and initiated broadcasters in Los Angeles, Korean Television Broadcast (KTB) and JoongAng Television Broadcast (JTB), had leased several hours of station time on KSCI (a.k.a. LA 18) and aired selective programs shipped directly from Korea. In the early 1980s, there was noticeably negative sentiment toward the Chun Doo-hwan (*Chun, Doo Hwan*) regime in Korea among Korean immigrants, conspicuously so after the Gwangju (*Kwangju*) Democratization Movement in 1980. The Korea Intelligence Agency (KCIA) operated its branch office in Los Angeles, based in the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Los Angeles, to make sure the emigrant community was not too critical of the Chun regime. KTB and JTB were both categorized as being liberal and therefore "dangerous" due to their critical opinions toward the home country's totalitarianism.

As a consequence, KTB and JTB were forced to stop operation and KTE was established in 1983 after merging KTB and JTB. KTE became the only Korean diaspora TV in Southern California and was able to block-book many of the prime-time hours of KSCI, pushing out other Asian competitors (Holley 1986). Ray Beindorf, then president of KSCI, expressed that Koreans are "the ones best equipped to buy time and put on the programming" (Cerone 1989). Other metropolitan cities—Chicago, Washington D.C., and New York where the majority of Korean immigrants resided—began operating their own Korean diaspora TV stations. Unlike Los Angeles, KBS did not establish branch offices. Instead, locally owned grassroots independent cable TV stations began airing Korean programs.[2] Korean diaspora TV stations targeted a very specific audience: exclusively Korean immigrants, a marginalized group in the marginalized ethnic "ghettos" of U.S. society. But this narrow-target market had already been dominated by a Korean-language video rental business, and that led to more complicated constraints.

Korean Diaspora TV, Koreatown Video Rental Businesses, and Competition

One of the most salient but rarely scrutinized subjects in the Korean diasporic media is the video rental business in major metropolitan cities, which holds an eminently narrowed, target-based business model. The circulation flows and distribution circuits of non-broadcast media products which connect the countries of origin—film and video—have been explored by many media scholars of diasporic Indian, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Latino audiences' audiovisual media consumption patterns. While examining the mediation of consensus regarding "Indianness" in the diaspora, Aswin Punathambekar observes that, for example, post-1965 migration to the United States was comprised mainly of educated professionals and their families but, in the early 1980s, people from a less-educated, largely merchant-class background began migrating to the U.S. The number of grocery stores rapidly increased all over the country during the period and it is these stores that served as "initial points of distribution for the video cassettes" (Punathambekar 2005, 154-55). VHS tapes are widely available to the diasporic audience, often with English subtitles to accommodate younger generations. "In the Indian diaspora," Vijay Mishra notes, "video is one of the key markers of leisure activity...It is also a not uncommon method of transmitting cultural events (weddings, anniversaries, even deaths of significant people such as Raj Kapoor) from the homeland to the diaspora or from diaspora to diaspora" (Hu 2006, 94).

The beginning of Korean video business and its patterns had shared elements with both Indian- and Chinese-language diasporas but there was one key distinctive aspect: the Korean diaspora spoke only one language, Korean. Sociologist Kyeyoung Park finds that Korean immigrants began to enter the fruit and vegetable business, called "greengrocers," in New York in 1971. This was pioneered by a group of newcomers who entered the United States via Latin American nations, particularly Argentina. By the early 1980s, Korean-Korean competition in the greengrocery market business grew fierce. Greengrocers began to sell flowers and additional grocery items, establish salad bars, and finally began renting VHS tapes (Park 1997, 51). Subtitles were not provided and, as a consequence, Korean TV dramas were circulated exclusively among Korean immigrants and *yuhaksaeng* (students studying abroad) who easily accessed homeland popular culture.

The Korean-language video market has long been tightly controlled by two major networks in Korea: KBS and MBC (Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation). To quote one video store manager in Manhattan, interviewed in February 2012, "In the 1980s and 90s, there were two content distributors in New Jersey. We signed contracts with distributors each year who deal with either KBS or MBC. We gave the distributors their fees each month and they gave us packages. We couldn't choose." Both KBS and MBC established their own distribution branches in Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, Atlanta, and New Jersey. Video store owners couldn't choose from catalogues but had to take what the distributor offered. The trader was always given only one master copy, usually two weeks after the original program aired in Korea, but was authorized by the contract to make as many copies as necessary from their own blank tapes. Each store paid approximately USD 1,200 to each distribution unit. To protect video stores and maximize the profits, KBS and MBC adopted a new strategy in the late 1980s: "holdŭbaek" (hold back). With this new policy, diaspora TV stations had to wait at least four weeks after the master tape had been delivered to the video stores. This holdŭbaek system helped the video stores mobilize huge profits. During the heyday of video stores, from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, KBS alone collected roughly USD 7 million each year.

By the late 1990s, the stabilized two-channel system—Korean diaspora TV stations and Koreatown video rental services—had been well-maintained in the United States; however, with the new millennium the media ecosystem drastically transformed, thanks to the development of digital technologies and the advent of *Hallyu*. Korean dramas have gained phenomenal popularity all over Asia since the *Winter Sonata* (*Kyŏul yŏn'ga*, 2002) syndrome in Japan and *Jewel in the Palace* (*Tae Changgŭm*, 2003-2004), *Full House* (*P'ul hausŭ*, 2004), and *The 1st Shop of Coffee Prince* (*K'ŏp'i P'ŭrinsŭ 1-hojŏm*, 2007) in China, Singapore, and Taiwan during the mid 2000s. Korean TV dramas in the United States in response, have actively been consumed by Asian and non-Asian users via online video-streaming services. The importance of Korean diaspora TV that connects Korean immigrants to their "home" culture, politics, and society has therefore exceedingly diminished since then, as the next-generation audience in the U.S. began actively embracing Korean TV dramas.

Escape from the "Ghetto": New Systems, New Outlets, and New Audiences

It is difficult to trace exactly when Korean TV dramas finally escaped from the Korean immigrants' "ghetto," and began penetrating the mainstream U.S. media market. The most conspicuous turning point was presumably the founding of the California-based YA Entertainment, the first official importer and distributor of Korean TV dramas outside of Korean diaspora media in America. YA Entertainment embarked on the manufacture and distribution of Korean TV drama DVDs in 2003. Tom Larsen, president of YA Entertainment, stated: "We have conducted multiple surveys over the past five years, surveying thousands of Korean drama 'fans' in the U.S. Interestingly, only 5 percent of respondents described themselves as 'Korean.' Therefore, roughly 95 percent of the people purchasing our Korean drama DVDs are not of Korean descent. The majority are Caucasian, Japanese-American, Chinese-American and Filipino-American. And we are also finding strong growth in the Vietnamese-American and Latino/Hispanic communities" (Larsen 2008, 141).

In the survey, close to 64 percent of Korean drama fans are based on the West Coast and, interestingly enough, Korean TV dramas garner a loyal following among America's baby boomers as more than 60 percent of respondents are older than 40 (Anon. 2006). In 2004, YA Entertainment provided its DVD box sets to Borders, Best Buy, and Barnes and Noble as well as major online retailers like Amazon.com and YesAsia.com. Larsen said, "Translating and subtitling are the most important part of the production process. If the package and the drama are great, but the English subtitles are terrible, people will feel likely they have wasted their money. We (YA) focus on producing high-quality subtitles geared for native English speakers" (2008, 142).

While YA Entertainment began distributing Region 1 DVD sets that feature newly translated English subtitles, the youth fans of Korean popular culture, unlike middle-aged consumers for the well-packaged DVD box sets, have increasingly been watching and sharing their favorite Korean TV dramas in cyberspace. If the internet-based fan communities have shaped new outlets for Korean TV dramas in the United States and elsewhere, then how have YA Entertainment and online fan communities influenced the existing two-channel distributions and consumption of Korean TV dramas among the Korean diaspora?

The most eminent impact is the near-collapse of the Korean video rental business. According to the U.S. Department of State report in 2010, KBS America's annual video sales revenue has dropped by over 50 percent since 2006. In 2006, KBS America had grossed USD 7.1 million but in 2008, it declined to 5.8 million. Then, in 2010, KBS only collected USD 3.3 million (Anon. 2011a). I conducted a series of interviews with video store owners in New York and New Jersey between February 26 and March 2, 2012. According to six owners in Manhattan, Elmhurst, Flushing, Fort Lee, and Palisade Park, it was 2003 and 2004 when they felt that something in their business was going wrong. By the early 2000s, although the business was not as prosperous as in the 1990s, most Korean diasporas, Korean Americans, and Korean Students were still renting video tapes at Korean town video rental stores. However, around 2004, sales began an alarming drop; the pace of decrease was unprecedented.

Korean diaspora TV stations were also severely wounded, not only by the factors above but also by the home country's ambitious venture, KBS WORLD. On June 1, 2001, KBS launched its first satellite broadcasting service, TV Korea. It soon changed its name to KBS WORLD. With selective programs from KBS, this satellite channel aimed at strategic foreign markets, including Japan, China, Latin America, and North America. With this new satellite service, KBS no longer needed to cooperate with the Korean diaspora TV stations, considering that the company could directly distribute television programs to the Korean diasporic and Asian American communities, as well as possible extensions to the mainstream media market in the United States, Europe, and elsewhere.

With the unprecedented success of Korean cultural products all over Asia, Korean TV dramas began circulating in the U.S. outside of the Korean "ghetto," first by Asian American youths, then mainstream media consumers who have finally noticed the wave during the second half of the decade. More importantly, these new fans of Korean dramas do not necessarily participate in the present two-channel system. Alternately, they are consuming, sharing, and participating in cyberspace via fan-based websites such as mysoju.com (now mysoju.tv), Viki.com, DramaCrazy.net, and allkpop.com. At this end, DramaFever.com, the first legitimate online video streaming service, conducted its first

beta test in 2009. Its business model was the first attempt to incorporate dispersed online fan communities, Asian-American youths, "baby boomer" consumers of YA Entertainment DVDs, *yuhaksaeng*, and potential users scattered online.

From Diaspora TV to Social Media

Henry Jenkins uses the term "pop cosmopolitanism" to refer to the ways that "the transcultural flows of popular culture inspires new forms of global consciousness and cultural competency" (Jenkins 2006, 156). He argues that young Americans distinguish themselves from their parents' culture through their consumption of Japanese anime and manga, Bollywood films, and Hong Kong action films. The most intriguing discussion in his essay is the role of "grassroots intermediaries" in shaping the flow of Asian cultural goods into Western markets. Jenkins closely examines two groups: the South Asian diasporic community and Western fans of Japanese anime, known as otaku. From immigrant grocery stores where Indian film VHS tapes were first circulated to the massive distribution campaigns of major Bollywood products to Western markets, the United States and Britain now account for 55 percent of international Bollywood ticket sales. On the other hand, anime entered the U.S. media market through small distributors who initially targeted Asian immigrants, mostly Japanese immigrants. However, anime soon traveled to newly-created fans, mostly in the U.S. colleges, with the help of "fansubbing" (Gonzalez 2007; Lee 2011).[3] Disney-Miramax picked up Miyazaki Hayao's *Princess Mononoke* (*Mononoke-hime*, 1997) in 1999 and Miyazaki's Studio Ghibli subsequently became a household name in the U.S. pop culture. David Desser, on the other hand, argues that during the mid-1990s the Hong Kong cinema entered into "its transnational and globalized capacity due in part to the massive Chinese diaspora" (Desser 2005, 219). The role of "the new cinephilia," according to Desser, emerged at this juncture as pirated DVDs and VCDs, as well as Chinatown video rental stores that helped non-Chinese speaking Americans access the content. The new cinephilia is hence the "product of global communication formation and film production sites centered in global cities, the cosmopolitan centers of cultural production as well as cultural consumption. And the genres favored by the new cinephiliac are those favored by the young Asian and Asianized Euro-American subjects living in these new global cities" (213).

Korean TV drama is the newest entry in this transnational cultural products flow. At the time they were conducting research, Jenkins and Desser had probably never met any fans of Korean TV dramas in the United States outside of Koreatown. In addition to this, Korean drama does not fit well into their frames. First, the Korean diasporic market is tiny compared to the vast Indian and Chinese diasporas' global networks, and no language/cultural diversity is involved. The Korean diasporic media had never been considered "important" to either the Korean or the U.S. media industries. Second, pirated VCDs or DVDs were not circulated in Koreatown. Korean dramas had exclusively been rented out via VHS tape formats, even up until the mid 2000s. Third, in contrast to American otaku who contributed a major role to the initial introduction of anime in the U.S., fans of Korean dramas outside of Korean communities had mostly been young Asian Americans and online fan communities that were scattered in Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore, Australia, and Canada—in other words, the *Hallyu* phenomenon.

This generated immeasurably large online fan communities and their network reached the United States around the mid 2000s.

It was two young Korean Americans who noticed this new trend before the competition began. Seung Bak and Suk Park were working in the U.S. media industry and instantly embarked on a business: They are the founders of DramaFever.com. "During my business trip to Asia, I noticed the immense popularity of Korean dramas," said Suk Park, who was born in Korea, raised in Spain, and educated in the United States. Park and his friend Seung Bak decided to research the consumption patterns for Korean TV dramas in the United States. "We noticed a business opportunity," Park continued, "when we found over two dozen pirate online sites servicing this content illegally with no real legal alternative for users" (Anon. 2010). Their initial research indicated that almost six million unique users watch Korean dramas on illegal video streaming websites in North America every month, such as bada.us (now bada.tv), jebangsong.com (now jebangsong1.org), and monorich.com for ethnic Koreans and DramaCrazy.net, Viki.com, mysoju.com (now mysoju.tv), Crunchyroll.com, and the Chinese website tudou.com for non-Korean speakers. Their business idea was simple: turn the existing illegal services into legitimate ones.

However, the biggest challenge was to persuade content owners in Korea. It took over eight months until Park and Bak finally signed their first licensing agreement with MBC in late 2008. KBS and Seoul Broadcasting System (SBS) followed shortly after. DramaFever opened with a beta version in January 2009, and it was August when the web site was fully operational. Park and Bak had maintained good relationships with fansubbing communities in Southeast Asia, and immediately after DramaFever was officially launched, these voluntary translators have been helping the company spend less on subtitling. But who are those fansubbers and why they are dedicating themselves to these painstaking labors?

In the past, consumption of certain types of Korean popular culture required a degree of Korean proficiency, which limited the participation of non-Korean speakers, including second-generation Korean-American youths whose Korean was not as fluent as their parents. But since the 2000s, Korean popular culture has become a source of shared reference and connection among some Asian American youths due to the spread of *Hallyu*. Asian-American youths' consumption of Korean TV dramas, hence, should be accounted for as "decisive factors" that have transformed the industry completely. In light of this, Jung-sun Park argued, "Transnational (im)migrant youth are key players in the transnational cultural flows, as exemplified by Korean American youths' roles as consumers, disseminators and potential creators of popular culture across the Pacific" (2004, 163). Through the spaces of social network services, fans of Korean TV dramas around the world set up online fan communities and share their knowledge, affections, and translations with other members, no matter what their nationalities are.

Brian Hu, while observing online fan communities such as D-Addicts.com, Soompi.com, and AsianFanatics.net and their forums for popular Korean drama *Love Story in Harvard* (*Lobŭ sŭt'ori in Habŏdŭ*, 2004), calls them "affective translation communities." Regarding linguistic translation, subtitle files are made by fan site members themselves and are timed to play with the pirated video files circulating among members of the communities above. Translation is, according to Hu, "intimately tied to the logic of community." These groups are communities because there is "an

understanding that users from around the world contribute their individual linguistic knowledge for the greater good of the collective. The work of translation itself is indicative of the group's collective emotional investment" (Hu 2010, 38).

Seung Bak, co-founder of DramaFever, told to the author during an interview at the company's small and cramped Manhattan office: "about 30-40 percent of our subtitles come from the fansubbers." Bak continued, "two fansub communities, Haru2subS and With S2, have closely been working with us. They are dedicated fans of Korean dramas and they are happy to see their works [subtitles] appear on a legitimate web service like ours." According to Bak, fansubbers of Korean TV dramas are mostly high school students and middle-aged housewives in Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, Singapore, and Philippines. They do not meet in person while actively communicating, sharing, and collaborating through the online communities.

The labor is generally operated in four divided stages; uploading, initial translating, typing, and editing/proofreading. For example, Bak explained, "the leader of Haru2subS is a high school student living in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, whose ability in Korean is very limited. He instead controls the whole procedure and working with community members whose ethnic, gender, and educational backgrounds are immensely diverse. The last part, proofreading, is largely done by Asian American members who reside in East and West coasts in America." As a compensation for their voluntary labors, DramaFever acknowledges each translator's name or ID at the end of each episode. As the company grew, the more skilled "fansubbers" were willing to work with DramaFever and therefore the quality of the subtitles was gradually increased.

In February 2009, only one month after its official launch, DramaFever reached 200,000 unique users visiting the website. To everyone's surprise, the number climbed up to four millions in April 2013. However, the real surprise was not in the number of unique users. It was the users' demographics that made the company even more promising. Who exactly is watching Korean TV dramas on DramaFever? Bak said, "Surprisingly, non-Asians make up 71 percent of the viewers, led by Caucasians (40 percent), African Americans (18 percent), and Hispanic (13 percent). Asians make up the remainder, which means only 29 percent." Then who are these 40 percent Caucasians? Bak answered, "These are the people who won't get a Korean cable channel or rent or buy DVDs in Koreatown." With these unexpected user demographics, DramaFever was able to negotiate with mainstream media outlets.[4] Hulu approached them and DramaFever set up its own channel on the Hulu platform in June 2010, with YouTube and Netflix following shortly thereafter.

By multiplying distribution platforms for its legitimate video contents, DramaFever is now diversifying its user demographics, from existing fans of Korean TV dramas to the mainstream American audiences who have not been exposed to Asian popular cultural products. DramaFever is, nevertheless, not the only video streaming service of Korean TV dramas nor is it the exclusive provider. A number of start-up sites such as Viki and Crunchyroll are specifically servicing this growing demand. The competition is therefore getting fiercer.

On March 21, 2013, *USA Today* published a special report entitled "American Audiences: I Want My International TV." The writer discussed DramaFever, Viki, and Crunchyroll as apparent examples of the new trend, and wrote, "TV viewers' appetites are going global as streaming technology broadens their options…from India's

Bollywood and Korean dramas to Japanese anime and Nigerian movies, more obscure foreign titles are legally accessible – often for free with a few clicks" (Anon. 2013a). Once a vibrant platform of illegally circulated anime fansubbing, Crunchyroll was founded in 2006 by a UC Berkeley graduates Kun Gao and his college friends. Crunchyroll has been strong at introducing new anime titles to the U.S. fans. In other words, it was a home of the U.S. otaku. But, as the investments from the venture capitals came in, the company had to transform its identity as a legitimate one. Crunchyroll gradually removed all copyright infringing materials from the site and made an official deal with TV Tokyo, a major broadcaster of anime in Japan (2013a). The company began servicing Korean dramas by taking over licensed Korean dramas of YA Entertainment after it shuts down in November 2011. On the other hand, a Singapore-based Viki has been focused on Korean, Taiwanese, and Japanese TV dramas since its inception. "There's a billion people watching premium content online and 85% of what they're watching is not from Hollywood." Razmig Havaghimian, founder of Viki, stressed: "We're going after that 85%" (Holmes 2011). The ever-growing market of international TV programs in America led video streaming platforms turned their attentions to newer territories – Chinese-Language and Spanish-Language dramas. DramaFever was not an exception.

In July 2012, DramaFever closed a round of funding amounting to U.S. 7 million USD in investments from AMC Networks, German media giant Bertelsmann and Mexico's NALA Investments (Roxborough 2012). DramaFever is now planning to expand its repertoire, including the addition of Chinese-language and Spanish-language titles. A new site called "DramaFever Latino" was launched later in 2012 in response to the rapidly growing number of Hispanic users. Isabel, a TV series from Spain quickly became one of the company's "five most-watched TV series" (Martinez 2013), and DramaFever has acquired new titles from Argentina's Telefe and Artear, Brazil's Bandeirantes, and Chile's TVN. "From day one," Bak stressed, "we never targeted the ethnic communities, this was about tapping into the cross-cultural, multi-racial community that was clearly demanding this service."

Given that DramaFever is now targeting more broad ethnic communities in the U.S., then in which platforms are Korean immigrants consuming homeland TV dramas? Traditional users of the Korean diaspora media are still watching TV dramas through the Korean diaspora TV but those indigenous broadcasting companies have been losing most of their loyal consumers and their influence to the communities have been greatly diminished under these rapidly changing media environments. As figure 1 and 2 indicate, by 2005, Korean immigrants were the highest consumers of ethnic TV among all Asian Americans. But soon most Korean diaspora TV stations had to face the unexpected growth of online-based video streaming services. According to Nielsen, in 2011, Asians/Pacific Islanders consume more Internet content than any other group, visiting 3,600 web pages in February – about 1,000 more than their counterparts. Although they watch the least amount of TV (3 hours and 14 minutes per day), they stream the most online video, averaging 10 hours and 39 minutes in February – more than double the overall mean of 4 hours and 20 minutes" (Pearson-McNeil and Hale 2011).

To survive, Korean diaspora TV increased the number of in-house programs to include local and nation-wide news, talk shows, documentaries, and home shopping shows. But as a strategy it appears this was both too late and ill-conceived. MKTV, for

example, started a new 24/7 cable TV channel called Korean News Network (KNN) in 2009. It aimed at consolidating a nation-wide network with other Korean diaspora TV stations in the United States. However, within only a year, KNN had to reduce the number of its products and also airtime, as almost one third of its stations went bankrupt in 2010. By September 2011, most Korean diaspora TV stations no longer aired the dramas of KBS, MBC, and SBS, and therefore their futures remain uncertain.

Korean diaspora TV stations had been facilitated by the homeland government as a propaganda apparatus aiming to scrutinize any anti-regime activities and generate favorable attitudes toward the totalitarian government during the 1980s. Each president, Chun, Roh Tae-woo (*Roh, Tae Woo*), Kim Young-sam (*Kim, Young Sam*), and even Kim Dae-jung (*Kim, Dae Jung*), had invited Korean diaspora media executives to the meetings with opinion and business leaders among overseas Koreans in the U.S. With the *Hallyu* phenomenon, nevertheless, the old model of broadcasting homeland television programs to the overseas Koreans is suddenly considered obsolete and not "innovative" or "creative" enough. And DramaFever replaced the position instead. Without any support from homeland and local communities, after nearly three decades, the Korean diaspora TV is now preparing to end its history of Korean community service in the United States. In May 2013, Bak and Park were seating at a table with Park Geun-hye, newly elected president of Korea. They were invited as one of the leading entrepreneurial ventures representing innovation and success around the world that the new government, under the catchphrase of a "creative economy," has sought after as the nation's new engines of sustainable growth. Suk Park proclaimed at the meeting, "We've always believed that through the distribution of Korean content we are increasing Korea's country brand and promoting its culture and global initiatives. We are proud to have been part of this event" (Anon. 2013b).

Conclusion

This chapter has traced and historicized Korean TV dramas' consumption in the United States from the 1980s' diasporic TV stations and video rental stores to the first legitimate video-streaming website, DramaFever. Before the new millennium, Korean TV dramas had rarely been consumed by the audiences outside of the market of the Korean diaspora. These TV stations in the United States had never imagined viewers other than ethnic Koreans and, consequently, by the late-1990s, the dramas had been distributed, circulated, and consumed exclusively by immigrants (mostly first-generation) and *Yuhaksaeng* via two dominant channels: Korean diaspora TV stations and Koreatown video rental stores. It was not until the early 2000s that programs from Korea, particularly television dramas, began airing with subtitles when the waves of *Hallyu* lapped at America's two coasts, driven as they were by digital technologies. Just before this, Sociologist Karim H. Karim wrote:

> Global migration trends have produced transnational groups related by culture, ethnicity, language, and religion. Whereas members of some of these groups had generally operated small media (weekly newspapers, magazines, radio and television programming) to meet the information and entertainment needs of their communication activities, the emergence of digital technologies is enabling them to expand such communication activities to a global scale (Karim 1998, 1).

Riding these waves of digital technologies, the advent of *Hallyu* meant the Korean TV drama began plugging into massive flows in the global media eco-system. After three decades, its consumption in the United States finally and decisively departed from the marginalized "ghetto."

On June 9, 2013, Abu Dhabi-based daily newspaper *The National* delivered an article, "Brace for an Era of Global TV." David Mattin, staff reporter, proclaimed, "Online content platforms mean the biggest television events aren't necessarily country-specific; rather they are global phenomena…and that, of course, is because television is no longer delivered via televisions, instead it's delivered via online space." At the end of the article, Mattin proclaimed: "a new generation of truly global television stars will soon be with us" (Mattin 2013). We are now witnessing a new chapter of global TV. When will the next chapter begin? Will the U.S. audiences embrace Korean soap opera stars? Only time will tell.

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Notes

[1] The first Korean immigrants that came to the United States were generally laborers, exiles, and picture brides, comprising a negligible portion of all Asian immigrants. By 1965, the total number of legal immigrants from Korea was just 54,852 (Daniels 1976, 3-4). However, this modest number has markedly increased since the mid 1960s. Between 1965 and 1980, 299,000 Koreans immigrated, trailing only the Filipinos among Asian groups in the number of new arrivals (Yu 1983, 24). According to the U.S. Census, as of the year 2000 there were approximately one million ethnic Koreans living in the United States and about a quarter of them lived in Southern California.

[2] As host to the second-largest Korean population in the United States, New York initiated its Korean diaspora TV, The Korean Channel (TKC), in March of 1986. According to Han Sang-gi, president of TKC, he aired Korean television programs under the company title of Daehan Broadcast, mainly television dramas, variety shows, and news, every Sunday morning from 9 to 10:30 through New York's UHF channel 47 since 1982,. TKC was among the first group of minority television stations of New York's Brooklyn-Queens Cable system, the first major cable TV system in New York's outer boroughs. TKC aired on the cable channel from noon to midnight Monday through Saturday, and from 11 am to 11 pm on Sunday (Han, 1994, 129-145). It soon became a 24-hour channel in 1991.

[3] Wikipedia defines, "fansub is a copy of a foreign movie or television [commonly anime] show which has been subtitled by fans in their native language … [and] shared amongst other fans." For more insightful discussion about this cultural phenomenon, see Gonzalez (2007) and Lee (2011).

[4] The unprecedented success of DramaFever made KBS reconsider its strategy in the United States. As KBS WORLD was now providing programs—30-40 percent TV Dramas, 20 percent variety shows/comedies, 20 percent news, and 20 percent documentaries—to satellite services such as Dish Net and Direct TV, the company, via its US branch KBS America, advanced into the Internet business in the United States by launching MVIBO.com in March 2011. MVIBO.com has, however, failed to gain attention from Korean TV drama fans as the company cannot provide communities for users.