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**Television Drama, Narrative Engagement, and Audience Buying Behavior: The  
Effects of *Winter Sonata* in Japan**

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# Television Drama, Narrative Engagement, and Audience Buying Behavior: The Effects of *Winter Sonata* in Japan

## Abstract

In the past few years, the popularity of Korean television dramas, songs, and movies has skyrocketed in countries of North and Southeastern Asia. This enormous wave of Korean pop culture is referred to as *Hanryu* (the Korean wave). One of the most significant trendsetters of *Hanryu* was the Korean television drama, *Winter Sonata*, which earned remarkable popularity in every Asian country where it broadcasted. The present article investigated the perception of Japanese audience members toward *Winter Sonata*'s narrative and how this perception influenced their buying behavior of *Winter Sonata* memorabilia, such as clothing, cosmetics, DVDs / CDs of the program, trips to Korea, and the like. Employing both qualitative and quantitative methods, this study found that popularity of the drama was generated by Japanese audiences' engagement in its narrative. Further, the audience perception of the narrative's quality was found to predict whether or not they purchased a *Winter Sonata* product.

**Keywords:** *Winter Sonata*, *Hanryu*, Television Effects, Narrative, Japanese Economy

## **Television Drama, Narrative Engagement, and Audience Buying Behavior: The Effects of *Winter Sonata* in Japan**

In the past few years, the popularity of Korean television dramas, songs, and movies has skyrocketed in countries of North and Southeastern Asia, such as Japan, China, Mongolia, Vietnam, Taiwan, and Thailand. The wave of Korean pop culture is commonly referred to as *Hanryu* (the Korean wave). This enormous influence of *Hanryu* has been unprecedentedly transforming Asian countries' domestic societies and even international relations, such as demise of dominance of Hollywood products in the media market and initiation of constructing a cross-national identity as ready consumers of this Korean cultural tsunami (Cho, 2005; Hanaki et al., 2007; Jin, 2006; Kim, 2006; Kim, 2005; Shim, 2006; Yin & Liew, 2005). In particular, Korean television dramas have become the most profitable Korean pop culture exports, enthralling all types of audiences including young and old, men and women, and rich and poor (Park, 2004). Transcending geography, culture, and nationhood, one of the trendsetters of this Korean pop culture wave was the Korean television drama, *Winter Sonata*, which earned tremendous ratings in every Asian country where it was broadcasted.

Such high popularity of *Winter Sonata* was directly reflected in the Japanese consumer market. Japanese manufacturers produced the same style of clothes and accessories that the actors and actresses of *Winter Sonata* wore, and consumer demands for the goods were often greater than the supply. Local bookstores displayed books and magazines featuring South Korean movies, music, clothes, and hairstyles. Video rental shops in Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, and other major cities dedicated large spaces of their

shelves to South Korean dramas, movies, and music videos (Tsukahara, 2004; Yoshida, 2004). South Korean actors and actresses now make regular appearances on Japanese mass media and enjoy immense popularity among Japanese audiences, perhaps even greater than what Japanese celebrities experience (Endo &Matsumoto, 2004). Across Japan, avid fans desiring direct engagement with the Korean media products without the aid of sub-titles or dubbing competitively registered Korean language schools (YTN, 2004). Not surprisingly, the audiences of the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation's (NHK) Korean-language programs have doubled over the past few years (Demick, 2005).

The popularity of *Winter Sonata* in Japan, as in other countries, was beyond imagination. For instance, when Bae Yong-Joon<sup>1</sup>, who played the main character (Jun-sang) in *Winter Sonata*, visited Tokyo in 2004, approximately 3,500 Japanese women swarmed the airport to welcome him. More than 350 riot police were called out to manage the situation and dozens of ambulances were ready for possible accidents. In frenzied attempts to move closer to Bae Yong-Joon, several women were injured and transported to hospitals for fractures, bruises, and sprains (Onishi, 2004; Victoria, 2005).

Given the enormous *Winter Sonata* boom in Japan, this study explored the television drama's overall influences on the Japanese society, specifically investigating the relationship between the signifying attributes of the television drama and the Japanese audiences' purchasing behavior of various consumer goods associated with *Winter Sonata*. This study employed a web-based survey to examine how the elements of audience perception toward the television drama affect audiences' behaviors measured by audiences' purchasing behaviors of *Winter Sonata*'s memorabilia. Finally, this study

discussed the results of the study and implications about how audiences' perception affects their behavioral and social changes.

### ***Winter Sonata* in Japan**

As an initial wave of *Hanryu*, which refers to the present vogue of South Korean popular culture spreading across countries such as Japan, Taiwan, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, and People's Republic of China, the 20-episode South Korean television drama, *Winter Sonata*, was first broadcast in Japan in 2003 (Dator & Seo, 2004; Endo & Matsumoto, 2004; Seo, 2005; Onishi, 2005).<sup>2</sup> *Winter Sonata* is a romantic drama. Its main theme is about first and pure (platonic and nonsexual) love. Other themes consist of friendship and traditional family values. The choice of romantic music, beautiful winter scenes, dramatic story, and inclusion of mysterious incidents in the story line all contribute to the drama's gripping narrative.

In 2003, NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) initially aired *Winter Sonata* in Japan on its satellite channel, NHK BS2 (Kin, 2004; Murakami, 2004; Victoria, 2005). Even though the number of viewers was limited because of the needed decoding devices and subscription fees, the drama received high acclaim among Japanese viewers. Further, news about the program spread like a brush fire through word of mouth. Responding to the explosive interest in *Winter Sonata*, NHK decided to rebroadcast the drama on the same satellite channel later in 2003. The second broadcast fueled the popularity of *Winter Sonata*, leading NHK to broadcast the drama again in April, 2004 through the NHK general channel which reached many more Japanese viewers (Victoria, 2005). NHK BS2 broadcasted the uncut version of *Winter Sonata* then in late December, 2004.

Through these consecutively repeated broadcasts, *Winter Sonata* grabbed the hearts of millions of Japanese viewers.

Such a Korean pop culture boom in Japan, initiated by *Winter Sonata*, is especially surprising given the hostile historical and political relationship between the two countries and their people. The animosity has its roots in Japan's annexation of the Korean peninsula, and its brutal exploitation of Korean people, both men and women, for over three decades (1909~1945) by the end of World War II (Dudden, 2004). South Korean and Japanese governments still have unsolved issues over territorial rights of an island (*Takeshima* in Japanese and *Dokdo* in Korean), which is in the sea between the two countries (Endo & Matsumoto, 2004), and Korean "comfort women," who were brutally forced into sexual labor during World War II for Japanese soldiers.<sup>3</sup> Further, around two million Koreans, many as slave laborers, were transported to work in Japan during the colonial period. Many of their Korean descendents still live in Japan without Japanese citizenship. Those descendents of Korean immigrants are called *Zainichi* Korean (literally "Korean residents in Japan") and they number approximately 700,000 (Han et al., 2007). These historical events have strained the relationship between the Japanese people (especially those in the older generation) and the South Koreans, North Koreans, and *Zainichi* Koreans.

Despite the multifaceted historical, political, and emotional barriers, when *Winter Sonata* was broadcasted in Japan, it immediately enjoyed explosive popularity among Japanese viewers, especially among middle-aged and older women, as numerous news media in Japan and Korea have reported (Hanaki et al., 2007). Its popularity with relatively older Japanese women is another intriguing fact because, when this audience

group was growing up (post WW II), the animosity and hostility toward Koreans was at its peak. Currently, these women fall in love with Bae Yong-Joon (the main actor of *Winter Sonata*), learn Korean, and travel to Korea to visit sites where *Winter Sonata* was filmed. This *Winter Sonata* phenomena and the accompanying *Hanryu* wave suggest the possibility for Japanese perceptual change about Korean-Japanese history and their diplomatic relationship, and offers a new perspective on everything South Korean (Chung, 2005; Han et al., 2007; Hanaki et al., 2007; Wiseman, 2004).

### **Audience Engagement in Television Drama and Consequential Behavior**

#### ***How are audiences engaged in television drama?***

Gunter (1988) identified the two most important factors of audience engagement in determining how viewers interpreted television content: (1) how real-life experiences compared to television portrayals and (2) viewers' ability to "identify how different plot elements link together to form a coherent story" (p. 37). Coupled with Gunter's insight, Fiske's (1986, 1989) research provides additional support for scholars to view television not as merely a content driven, one-way medium of communication, but rather as a site where meanings are created through audiences' interaction with programs. In his view, the relationship between television shows and audiences is intertextual because of the polysemic nature of the medium. Although particular ideals may be dominant in television programs, the varied nature of the audience makes the process of making meaning intertextual (Fiske, 1989, p. 13). The audience then is able to impart meaning taken from television and incorporate it into their own cultural lives "when its presence is less direct, less obvious" (p. 74). For this reason, it is important for us to understand how



content and form might influence audience interpretation of mediated texts and their consequent behaviors.

In assessing audience interpretation of television, impacting both American and international audiences, television dramas and soap operas have been the focus of numerous studies (Modleski, 1982; Perse & Rubin, 1988; Rubin & Perse, 1987; Schrag & Rosenfeld, 1987; Singhal, Cody, Rogers, & Sabido, 2004; Wheatley, 2001). A key concept in many of these studies, either implicit or explicit, is the Burkean notion of identification. For example, according to Cheney (1983), when television viewers say that they identify with characters in serial daytime dramas, they feel as if they are “having ideas, attitudes, or intentions similar to those of the appealing character, or acting in a manner similar to the character” (p. 146). In addition, Conrad’s (1988) analysis of workers’ identification with song lyrics for definitions of self relates to similar phenomenon:

Texts that articulate dialectical relationships which parallel readers’ everyday experiences possess a high level of perceived relevance for readers and thereby guide consumption toward texts that are congruent with reconstructed experiences.

Texts invite readers to participate in them, to become consubstantial with their personae, and to identify with the world view they implicitly contain (p. 182).

Both Cheney and Conrad’s research seems to support the idea that characters, plot, and audiences’ experiences are key to identification.

By integrating several elements of the previous studies, Fisher’s (1985, 1987, 1989) narrative paradigm provides a holistic view of audience engagement in serialized narratives. Fisher integrates Bormann’s view of fantasy into his paradigm. That is,

audiences perceive fantasies in public narratives with which they wish to identify either because they are true to the lives of the audience, or they are what the audience wishes were true in their reconstructions of the narrative. Whereas Burke and Bormann might refer to this phenomenon as identification, Fisher refers to it as narrative fidelity, or as the way stories people experience “ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives” (p. 64). In addition, two key elements, which are *narrative probability* (or *coherence*) and *narrative fidelity*, in Fisher’s paradigm provide the means through which audience interpretation of narratives may be evaluated. Fisher (1987) explains five presuppositions of the paradigm as:

- (1) Humans are essentially storytellers...
- (2) The paradigmatic mode of human decision-making and communication is “good reasons,” which vary in for among situations, genres, and media of communication...
- (3) The production and practice of good reasons are ruled by matters of history, biography, culture, and character...
- (4) Rationality is determined by the nature of persons as narrative beings – their inherent awareness of *narrative probability*, what constitutes a coherent story, and their constant habit of testing *narrative fidelity*, whether or not the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives...
- (5) The world as we know it is a set of stories that must be chosen among in order for us to live life in a process of continual re-creation (pp. 64-65).

Fisher (1987) explains narrative probability as the way the story “hangs together” (p. 47).

In evaluating a story’s probability, three types of coherence should be taken into consideration. First, its *argumentative* or *structural coherence* allows us to examine how well the story is put together in terms of its form. Second, a narrative’s *material*

*coherence* allows us to examine how this story compares to others. Third, *characterological coherence* is key to understanding how the characters in a story contribute to its believability (p. 47). This third element is important in interpreting not only the decisions and actions made by the characters themselves, but also, in this case, those of the audience as well.

Narrative fidelity must be taken with coherence as a standard for evaluating a story. *Fidelity* refers to the truthfulness of a story as assessed by “the logic of good reasons,” that is, using rules of logic as well as “questions about fact, relevance, consequence, consistency, and transcendental issues” (pp. 47-48) to determine if the story speaks to its audience. Fisher incorporates what others have referred to as identification within this construct but takes it further by incorporating the idea that only when people see the stories as consistent with their own lives are they able to identify with them.

***How does audience perception of a television program affect consumer behavior?***

The main focus of this study is to investigate if audience perceptions cause actual behavioral consequences. Cultivation theory may be relevant here given it explains the relationship between audience perception of media products and its consequent behaviors. Cultivation theory deals with “how mass media affect the individual’s construction of social reality” (Lee, 1989, p.772). According to Hawkins and Pingree (1982), television viewing cultivates some aspect of social reality. This view lends support to other studies that argue that television, as a medium, exerts the strongest influence on people’s everyday lives (Kwak, Zinkhan, & Dominick, 2002; Lee, 1989; Meyer, 1989). In this sense, cultivation theorists may argue that television viewing may elicit certain audience

behaviors, such as purchasing goods on the basis of cues provided in the media text (Meyer, 1989).

Cultivation theory is likely to be validated in many cultures, even though the most studies are based in the United States. In the context of consumer behavior, Lee (1989) empirically applied cultivation theory to the study of consumer acculturation processes with three different cultural groups – Taiwanese, Taiwanese residents in the U.S., and Americans. From the study examining the relationship between exposure to mass-media and the perception of consumption reality in the three groups, Lee found that cultivation theory was commonly applicable to all three ethnic groups. Kwak, Zinkhan, and Dominick's (2002) study of the impact of television content on viewers also support cultivation effects in both the United States and South Korea.

Coupled with cultivation theory, social action theory provides a theoretical background in considering the relationship between audience perception and behavioral consequences. Meyer (1989) explains that social action theorists have observed how human beings perceive their surroundings through “referencing others in on-going and emerging performance” (p.787). Anderson and Meyer (1989) also explain how mediated communication can influence the on-going daily social routines of individuals, including their daily buying behavior.

In the examination of *Winter Sonata*, these behavioral and perceptual issues are not as mutually exclusive, as perhaps cultivation theory and social action theory would posit. O'Guinn and Shrum (1997) also argue that social perceptions of television programs are significant sources of consumption. Our study thus argues that the way

audiences perceive *Winter Sonata* affects their buying behavior of *Winter Sonata* memorabilia.

### ***Winter Sonata* Effects on the Japanese Society and Audiences**

An empirical investigation of the *Winter Sonata*'s popularity in Japan began with reviewing newspapers that reported the *Hanryu* and *Winter Sonata* phenomenon. In this study, 669 newspaper articles that dealt with *Winter Sonata*'s influence on the Japanese society during 2003 to 2007 were collected from both Korean and Japanese newspapers. Since the research team was made up of both Japanese and Korean nationals, both Japanese and Korean newspapers were accessible.

For a content analysis, we first determined categories for the articles. From our overview of all selected articles, five categories were identified for analysis: *Winter Sonata* appeared to have influence in the area of (1) spurring business, (2) spurring fan groups, (3) influencing the geo-political relationship between Korea and Japan, (4) Japanese culture, and (5) evoking memories of historical ties between Japan and Korea, and suggesting alternative readings of the troubled history. Two individuals were trained extensively by the authors for coding the newspaper context. In order to ensure that each coder achieved a satisfactory level of understanding and agreement, 10% of the sample transcripts (67 articles) were selected and used to establish a respectable inter-coder reliability (Lacy & Riffe, 1996). Reliability between two coders was determined by Cohen's kappa (Cohen, 1960). If Kappa values are greater than .75, it indicates excellent agreement beyond chance, whereas if the values are less than .40, it represents poor agreement (Fleiss, 1981). For this study, inter-coder reliability was high (kappa = .93).

The result of this content analysis presented that 179 articles focused on *Winter Sonata*'s influence on Japanese culture (26.8%); 154 articles on fan groups (23.0%); 62 articles on economic/business effects of *Winter Sonata* (9.3%); 48 articles on the political relationship between Japan and Korea (7.2%); and 38 articles on a reconsideration of the history between Japan and Korea (5.7%). Among the selected articles, 420 articles specifically mentioned *Hanryu* in their content. Interestingly, this study found that most articles in the fan group category reported *Winter Sonata*'s influence on a particular group of people, middle-aged women.

Relevant to a purpose of this study, which is investigation of media effect on audience behavior, articles detailing economic/business effects of the show dealt mainly with Japanese consumers' buying products related to *Winter Sonata*, including spending money on trips to Korea, and new businesses related to the products of *Winter Sonata* memorabilia in Japan. Even though this study found that middle-aged women were the biggest fan group, articles dealing with economic/business issues reported the new consumer behavior as a nationwide phenomenon across all age groups.

To better understand the reasons for *Winter Sonata*'s popularity among Japanese people, we further examined the articles that described *Winter Sonata*'s fan groups. Articles that described the drama itself and people's response to the show contained two main themes: (1) the significance of the story as a "pure (non-sexual, but platonic) love" story, "a story that does not exist in Japan any more," and a tale of "lost love," and (2) the lead actor's (Bae Yong-Joon) image that was constructed by the narrative of the drama as "charmingly old-fashioned," "caring," and "devoted." This finding strongly suggested that the drama's narrative was the root of *Winter Sonata*'s popularity in Japan. Even

though many articles reported the popularity of the main actor in Japan, his popularity appeared to be associated with his image constructed in the drama's narrative showing his pure love and devotion.

### **Perception and Behavior**

A quantitative investigation was designed to explore what kinds of audience perception for *Winter Sonata* are most engaging for Japanese viewers, and to examine if audience perception of *Winter Sonata* creates any particular behavior measurable as an indicator of empirical evidence of the media effect. Based on Fisher's narrative theory and the results obtained from the content analysis, we identified five key variables contributing to the overall quality of *Winter Sonata*: narrative fidelity ("While I was watching the drama, I thought that this seemed to happen in reality"), narrative coherence ("I eagerly looked forward to watching the next episode of *Winter Sonata*"), emotional appeal ("The plot of this drama was emotionally very touching"), others' evaluation of the narrative ("My friends have talked about this drama to me), and its entertainment value ("This drama is overall very entertaining"). The team checked each item of the questionnaire for clear meaning, that the items measured what we intended to measure, and that questions had equivalent meanings in Japanese and Korean translations (DeVellis, 2003).

### **Research Design**

The research included two phases of investigation, having two hypotheses. The first analysis was planned to examine which aspects of *Winter Sonata*'s narrative are most engaging for Japanese viewers. Based on this plan, this study hypothesizes:

***H1:** Japanese viewers' perception of the quality of Winter Sonata's narrative is positively associated with the narrative's coherence and fidelity along with emotion, peer-evaluation, and entertainment.*

To test this hypothesis, five variables were examined: narrative fidelity, narrative coherence, emotional involvement, others' evaluation of the narrative, and its entertainment value. Using a five-point Likert scale (from "Strongly Disagree=1" to "Strongly Agree=5"), the first part of the survey consisted a set of six questionnaires. One was about overall evaluation of the quality of *Winter Sonata*'s storyline (M=2.64, SD=1.50), which was a dependent variable. The others were about the narrative elements including narrative coherence (M=3.19, SD=1.55) and fidelity (M=2.98, SD=1.45), emotional involvement (M=2.83, SD=1.52), influences from others talking about the drama (M=3.14, SD=1.50), and the degree of entertainment value (M=2.93, SD=1.30). Having these variables, we planed to test this hypothesis by using a multivariate equation model with one dependent variable and five independent variables.

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + \varepsilon_i$$

where dependent variable (Y<sub>i</sub>) = Evaluation about the quality of narrative

Independent variable (X<sub>1</sub>) = The degree of narrative coherence

Independent variable (X<sub>2</sub>) = The degree of narrative fidelity

Independent variable (X<sub>3</sub>) = The degree of emotional involvement

Independent variable (X<sub>4</sub>) = The degree of peer-to-peer dissemination effect

Independent variable (X<sub>5</sub>) = The degree of entertainment value



The second part of the questionnaire asked about if viewer's perceptions about the quality of *Winter Sonata*'s narrative affect their purchase of consumer products associated with the television drama as an indicator of empirical evidence of the media effects. Participants were asked if they purchased any products related to the television series, such as the soap opera's music CD, DVD, video tapes, magazines, clothing, cosmetics, or fashion products that actors or actresses modeled in the program. This purchasing behavior was measured on a binary scale: "Yes, I have purchased" (Valid percentage = 72.3%) and "No, I have not purchased" (Valid percentage = 27.7%).

This question was examined by testing the following hypothesis:

**H2:** *The more positively Japanese audience members perceive Winter Sonata's narrative, the more likely they are to purchase products associated with Winter Sonata.*

Since the purchasing behavior was measured by using a binary choice scale, answering "purchased" and "not purchased," this study tested this hypothesis with a logistic regression model:

$$P_i = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \varepsilon_i$$

Where P = 1 if an individual purchased any products from *Winter Sonata*

Independent variable (X<sub>1</sub>) = The degree of the narrative's quality

Independent variable (X<sub>2</sub>) = The degree of peer-to-peer dissemination

Independent variable (X<sub>3</sub>) = The degree of emotional involvement

Independent variable (X<sub>4</sub>) = The degree of entertainment value

### ***Data Collection Procedures***

Both Japanese and Korean websites were used as data collection sites. Empirically, after *Winter Sonata* was broadcast in Japan, numerous Japanese citizens began to browse Korean drama and celebrity websites, share their opinions, and post messages on both Korean and Japanese websites. This study mainly collected data on *Winter Sonata* and Mr. Bae Yong-Joon's personal fan club websites in Japan and Korea. A link to the survey was posted on these websites for three months. During this period, a message encouraging people's voluntary participation in this survey was posted for (or re-posted) approximately once a month on both countries' websites. Given the historical baggage, we were careful to not include language that could incite nationalistic sentiments. As a result, one hundred and sixty four Japanese participants completed the web-based survey, excluding one uncompleted survey.

The participants tended to be strongly involved with the *Winter Sonata* boom in Japan. Japanese participants who accessed Mr. Bae Yong-Joon's Korean website were those who could read Korean and tried to talk with Korean fans, making a big effort to learn and practice the Korean language. Those who accessed the Japanese website had to be members first in order to participate in the survey. Therefore, our survey participants could be regarded as self-selected individuals with a high motivation to share their opinions and voice about *Winter Sonata*. Although this was by no means a random sample, the self-selected sample of highly involved viewers can be regarded as opinion leaders among other *Winter Sonata* fans. Therefore, given that the *Winter Sonata* phenomena was already observed, these opinion leaders' perceptions and behaviors could draw followers (Rogers, 2003; Weimann, 1994).

First, a multivariate regression analysis was conducted to determine which independent variables (narrative coherence, narrative fidelity, peer evaluation, emotional involvement, and entertainment value) would be significant predictors of Japanese audiences' perception about the narrative quality of *Winter Sonata*. Regression results indicated this model accounted for 40.3 % of variance in the dependent variable which is Japanese audiences' perception of *Winter Sonata's* narrative quality,  $R^2 = 0.403$ ,  $R^2_{adj} = 0.384$ . This model significantly predicted the dependent variable,  $F(5, 158) = 21.363$ ,  $p < .001$ . A summary of the regression model is presented in Table 1. Variance inflation factors (VIF's) for all variables are low enough to confirm no problem with multicollinearity.

**[Table 1 about Here]**

Given the results showing statistical significance of the narrative coherence, narrative fidelity, and emotional involvement variables, these three variables provided positive insights on the perceptions of narrative quality. This test revealed that emotional involvement had a higher statistical significance than values of narrative coherence and fidelity. In addition, the partial correlation coefficient of the emotional involvement variable indicates the highest relationship with the audience perception of the drama's narrative quality (DV).

Coupled with the effectiveness of Fisher's narrative theory (narrative coherence and narrative fidelity) and emotional involvement, this study examined whether or not the power of narrative engagement is significant enough to influence audiences' purchasing behavior. The variables in this multiple regression equation were the same as in the first regression model. However, instead of separate narrative coherence and fidelity

variables, an overall “quality of narrative” variable was added in the equation, representing the dropped variables (Cronbach’s Alpha between narrative coherence and fidelity = .867). The rule of parsimony validates this substitution in the model, given that our results clearly demonstrate that the narrative coherence and fidelity variables are strongly correlated with audiences’ perception about the narrative’s quality (See Table 2 for correlation matrix between variables).

**[Table 2 about Here]**

A logistic regression was conducted to identify which independent variable(s), including quality of narrative, emotional involvement, peer evaluation and entertainment value, predict audiences’ purchasing of goods associated with *Winter Sonata*.

Regression results indicated that the overall model of four predictors was statistically reliable in distinguishing between audiences’ purchasing and non-purchasing behaviors (-2 Log Likelihood = 89.717;  $\chi^2$  (4) = 105.760,  $p < .001$ ). The regression coefficients are presented in Table 2. Wald statistics indicated that perceptions of narrative’s quality, audiences’ emotional involvement, and peer evaluation significantly predict people’s purchase of *Winter Sonata* goods. Odds ratios for the significant variables indicate a remarkably significant change in the likelihood of purchase.

The results of this logistic regression demonstrates the statistical significance of the perceived quality of *Winter Sonata*’s narrative (narrative coherence and narrative fidelity) as a predictor of audience members’ purchasing behavior (See Table 3 for summary of logistic regression analysis). This finding suggests that the more the audience members perceive a narrative as being coherent, realistic, emotionally involving, and appreciated by their peers, the higher the probability of their purchasing products

associated with the drama. Another interesting finding was that the emotional involvement variable in the narrative was the strongest one affecting audience members' purchasing behavior, which was similar to the result of the multiple regression analysis above. This result also showed a high correlation between overall quality of narrative and emotion.

**[Table 3 about Here]**

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

The popularity of *Winter Sonata* and *HanRyu* has taken Asia, especially Japan, by storm. Korean popular culture products have earned an enormous fan base (Han et al., 2007; Hanaki et al., 2007). Our analysis of the media coverage accorded to *HanRyu* demonstrates the multiple influences of *Winter Sonata* on Japanese culture and economy, the political relationship between Japan and Korea, and an alternative reading of the troubled history between the two countries.

Our study suggests that *Winter Sonata*'s influence in Japan can be explained by the audience members' engagement with its narrative: that is, it was perceived as being coherent, realistic, and emotionally involving. Theoretically, our study specifically provided both qualitative and quantitative support for Fisher's constructs of narrative fidelity and coherence. The narrative, in this case, realistically portrayed characters' lives that nostalgically reminded Japanese viewers of their past and present lives (O'Sullivan, 1998). Further, the sequentially well organized narrative (e.g. narrative composition) with intriguing and ongoing episodic events stimulated viewers' curiosity for watching the next episode, maintaining their loyalty toward the series.

Our findings empirically support the validity of narrative theory across different cultural sites. Even though most narrative theories, such as Fisher's (1985, 1987, 1989) theory, developed in North America, the effectiveness of narrative on people's perception and behavior may be universal as this study implies. This study strongly suggests that narrative coherence and fidelity are significant elements of the quality of narrative in Asian culture as well as has been shown by other studies (Chitnis, Thombre, Rogers, Singhal & Sengupta, 2006; Rogers, Singhal & Thombre, 2004).

Related to this universal assumption of effectiveness of narrative, one may ask why the concept of "pure love" resonated so strongly with Japanese audiences as well as people in other Asian countries. Theoretically, Carl G. Jung's notion of archetypes is helpful here. Archetypes refer to an idealized model of a person, object, and concept which are parts of a universal and collective memory (Jung, 1981; Singhal & Udornpim, 1987). For instance, archetypal images of "mother," "father," "hero," and "virgin" resonate with all humankind and reify certain universal patterns of behavior (Sabido, 1980). Perhaps the characters and the emotions they portrayed (e.g. "pure love") served as archetypes in several different Asian countries.

Empirically, this emotional attraction toward "pure love" can transcend national boundaries and is regarded as a distinctive theme that is universally shared. For instance, Singhal and Udornpim (1997) pointed out that the worldwide popularity of *Oshin*, a Japanese television drama in the early 1980s, was related to the Asian concept of love, which included a measure of sacrifice and relationship endurance. These elements of love, not driven primarily by sexual pursuits, also constituted the image and emotion of "pure love" portrayed in *Winter Sonata*'s romantic narrative.

*Winter Sonata*'s culturally shared narrative contributes to enhancing globalization and reduces the restrictions of nationalism, ethnic difference, and physical distance. In other words, the soap opera spurred "cultural proximity" (Straubhaar, 1991) among Asian countries, and this close "cultural proximity" created another identity representing a collective Asian group as a whole. The effects of closer cultural proximity created by the diffusion of popular culture have multidimensional implications, including political, economic, and cultural (Iwabuchi, 2002; Staubhaar, 1991).

Another significant distinctive issue was *Winter Sonata*'s influence on middle-aged Japanese women, who seemed to be reminded about what love and passion meant to them in their younger years. The Japanese audience perceived this television drama as an old-fashioned story of pure love, akin to the classic Japanese drama format of a few decades ago (Endo & Matsumoto, 2004). Such slow paced, sensitive, and modest development of romantic relationships is rarely featured in contemporary Japanese television dramas. *Winter Sonata* evoked a strong sense of nostalgia on part of middle-aged Japanese women; at the same time, it perhaps captivated younger viewers with its novelty (Victoria, 2005).

This study of *Winter Sonata* also provides some recommendations for media industries targeting the Asian market. The Asian media market has been greatly growing, influenced by *Winter Sonata* and *Hanryu*. This growth of the Asian media market can be empirically observed through the numerous Japanese audience members who purchased *Winter Sonata* DVDs, CDs, magazines, and accessories, and traveled to Korea. Many economic research institutions also predicted and empirically verified positive economic effects of *Winter Sonata*, such as increasing international trade between Korea and other

Asian countries including Japan. Therefore, the relationship between narrative elements and related purchasing behaviors can inform the decision making process regarding what media items may be more lucrative in the market.

When selecting media fare to import or export in the Asian media market, media merchandisers should pay closer attention to the content of narrative constructs, such as coherence, fidelity, and emotionality, rather than merely entertainment value, reputation of actors or actresses, or existing social norm. The present study demonstrated that with Japanese audiences the entertainment value of *Winter Sonata* did not turn out to be a significant influence on their buying behavior, whereas narrative coherence/fidelity and emotionality were significant influences on purchasing behavior. Therefore, media merchandisers, especially in Japan and in Asian contexts, may reap more benefits from importing and exporting emotionally appealing, nostalgic, and well-crafted melodramatic series.

Finally, our study sheds light on the power of an engaging narrative in spurring perceptual and behavioral changes, including diluting historical antagonism, creating favorable attitudes on the part of many Japanese toward Koreans, and buying of *Winter Sonata* goods. The narrative power to change people's perceptions and behaviors has significant applicability in the field of social change (O'Sullivan, 1998, Singhal & Rogers, 1999). For instance, many HIV/AIDS prevention efforts have applied a variety of televised narratives to change people's sexual perception and to prevent risky behaviors (Brinson & Brown, 1997; Eva, 1998; Galavotti, Pappas-Deluca, & Lansky, 2001). In addition, many entertainment-education scholars have also focused on this narrative effect as a method of fostering change in other social sectors like adult literacy, gender



equality, and environmental conservation (Singhal, Cody, Rogers, & Sabido, 2004; Singhal & Vasanti, 2005; Vaughan, Rogers, Singhal, & Swalehe, 2000).

In conclusion, as an icon of Korean popular culture, *Winter Sonata* has led the *Hanryu* (Korean cultural wave) in Asian countries. This overarching influence of *Winter Sonata* has continued for many years, transcending national borders. Its impact has not just been on individuals, but has promoted new international trade and diplomatic closeness. In this sense, *Winter Sonata* along with *Hanryu* has created not only a new perceptual image of South Korea, but contributed to constructing an Asian solidarity based on popular consumption.

This study suggests that communication scholars should further analyze the *Hanryu* phenomenon in Asia. Clearly, there are many economic, political, and social issues associated with this transnational popular culture phenomenon. Comparative studies that extend the investigation of *Hanryu* beyond Japan to other Asian countries are warranted.

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Table1. *Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables affecting the Viewers' perception of the Narrative Quality of Winter Sonata (N=164)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	SE <i>B</i>	$\beta$	Partial r	VIF
Narrative Coherence	.197	.361	.195*	.157	2.511
Narrative Fidelity	.238	.104	.224*	.180	2.514
Emotional Involvement	.456	.087	.457**	.383	2.031
Peer Evaluation	.078	.085	.077	.072	1.909
Entertainment	-.140	.078	-.120	-.141	1.186

\*p < .05., \*\*p<.01

Table 2. *Bivariate Correlation Matrix of Variables Considered in Regression Analyses*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Narrative Fidelity	-					
2. Narrative Coherence	.740**	-				
3. Emotion	-.095	.153*	-			
4. Peer Evaluation	-.099	.058	.677	-		
5. Entertainment	-.174*	-.019	.327**	.341**	-	
6. Overall Quality of Narrative	.338**	.437**	.478**	.334**	.013	-

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3. *Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis for Variables affecting Viewers' Purchase of Winter Sonata Goods (N=160)<sup>4</sup>*

Variable	B	Wald	df	P	Odds Ratio
Overall Quality of Story	.714	8.410	1	.004	2.043
Emotion	1.000	11.700	1	.001	2.719
Peer Evaluation	.740	7.588	1	.006	2.095
Entertainment	-.435	2.689	1	.101	.647
Constant	-8.165	28.813	1	<.001	.000

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> In order to call Korean names, this paper follows the Korean way of name calling which is last name first and first name last. Therefore, Bae is his last name, and Yong-Jun is his first name.

<sup>2</sup> *Winter Sonata* was produced by the Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) in 2002.

<sup>3</sup> The comfort women and the Korean government have demanded compensation and Japan's apology for their inhumane treatment.

<sup>4</sup> After initial data screening, four missing cases were eliminated.