

Dissecting The Intolerance Towards Korean Wave

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As an avid K-drama fan and the occasional K-pop listener, I have come across many people who passionately despise the Korean wave. Interestingly, most of these “haters” have never experienced anything related to the Hallyu.

Rather than getting needlessly defensive or aggressive about it, I decided to take a closer look at this unabashed hatred and rejection.

A FLAWED IDEA OF GENDER

Most people offended by Korean pop culture think BTS is all there is to the Korean wave due to their lack of exposure. Consequently, their primary reaction revolves around mocking male idols for their “feminine” appearance. To find something funny or inappropriate on grounds of being masculine or feminine is another way of saying gender is definitive – which is not the case.

The traditionally accepted behaviour ascribed to a specific gender is not set in stone, rather a cultural creation turned into the norm. Therefore, the idea of masculinity and femininity itself is a constructed normalcy, not an absolute truth. Reflection of this fluidity is readily available in the fashion world as well.

The idea of “manly men” that most people refer to while calling out the male K-pop idols as feminine is mostly based on the image of a man in modern western



clothing with no make-up or accessories. However, what is considered manly now was not considered so for most of human history. For most of both Western and Eastern fashion history, wealthy men with social standing wore colourful clothes, coats with frills, makeup and jewellery. They were not considered feminine then because the definition of gender is space-time specific, therefore subject to change. Rejecting a subculture based on non-conformist fashion

only goes to show the extent to which we have internalized the patriarchal construction of gender norms.

A COLONISED MIND

Usually, the same people who hate the very word “Hallyu” have no trouble worshipping Hollywood. People will look at you like you sinned if you accidentally say “Saranghae”, but admire you if you speak fluent English. Yes, one entertainment

industry might be better than the other and one language might be universal, but that is completely subjective. That subjectivity is lost when, despite having no prior experience, you start believing a subculture is essentially inferior just because it is Asian.

This is a classic example of a colonised mindset that still subscribes to a Eurocentric narrative by subconsciously believing that anything from “the West” is inherently better than anything that comes from “the East”. We may not be visibly colonised anymore but the cultural hegemony blinding us is a definite sign that we have yet to decolonise our minds.

Yes, you might not like the music, food, drama, fanbase and a lot of other things once you have tried dipping your toes in Hallyu. But if you are blindly hating the entire subculture without ever having experienced it, it is worth asking yourself why. And if by any chance you manage to look past the obvious racism and patriarchal mindset, what is on the other side might surprise you.

References

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Tazreen is your typical angry liberal arts student who likes to blame it all on capitalism. Send her anger management tips at tazreenzahan@gmail.com

How “American” Is American Pop Culture?

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I loved Steven Spielberg’s *E.T. the Extra Terrestrial* (1982) as a child. I can’t tell you the number of times I’ve watched it with my mother. It was something of a weekend ritual at one point.

So, imagine how gutted I felt upon discovering that one of my favourite works in cinema was essentially a rip-off.

E.T. the Extra Terrestrial (1982) was never Spielberg’s work to begin with. It was based on an original work titled *The Alien* (1967) by the legendary Bengali writer and filmmaker Satyajit Ray. We all firmly acknowledge it; half the world’s population still credits Spielberg with the creation of *E.T.*

Welcome to Art of Re-packaging Cultural Elements 101, brought to you by American Pop Culture.

How many of you know what the following three films – Darren Aronofsky’s *Black Swan* (2010) and *Requiem for a Dream* (2000), as well as Christopher Nolan’s *Inception* (2010) – have in common? Here’s a name to help put things into perspective for you: Satoshi Kon. One of Japan’s most revered filmmakers and manga artists. Kon’s work in anime has received plenty of critical acclaim. Alas, Kon was unable to establish himself as a global icon through his works, unlike filmmakers Aronofsky and Nolan. The latter two essentially plagiarised the works of the former, added their respective Americanised spin to it, and marketed it for a global audience. Since Kon is no longer alive to hold the two filmmakers accountable for theft of intellectual property, here’s what our filmmakers say: “We were simply inspired.”



The meme about copied homework comes to mind. Let’s talk business. How much money does the USA rake in while ripping off other cultures? The answer: plenty.

Hollywood alone has profited tremendously over the years remaking foreign films. Popular examples include Martin Scorsese’s *The Departed* (2006) which grossed 132 million dollars after being remade from the Hong Kong

action film *Internal Affairs* (2002); the *Godzilla* movie that came out in 1998, part of Japanese film studio Toho’s *Gojira* franchise, was the ninth highest grossing film in the American box office that year, and upon being remade by Legendary Entertainment and Warner Bros. Pictures in 2014, grossed over 500 million dollars worldwide.

Outside Hollywood, we have even more white-owned businesses which tend to pass off the act of whitewashing other cultures as a “modern makeover”. In January 2021, an American business based in Dallas made headlines in several news portals for attempting to “refresh” the traditional Chinese game of Mahjong for “stylish masses”, selling each set for hundreds of dollars. According to the white owners of “The Mahjong Line”, founder Kate LaGere found the traditional Mahjong tiles to be unsuitable for her personality and sense of style, and hence sought to remake the game in her own image: a white American woman with no ties to the Chinese culture.

America at this point has a long and extensive history of re-packaging elements of other cultures, and subsequently presenting them to a global audience as part of the American pop culture. From the exploitation of sacred Native American dreamcatchers as a “Bohemian theme” or attempts to steal the spotlight away from Asian filmmakers through Hollywood, the distinctive white American-ness of American pop culture clocks in at about 20 percent, give or take.

Rasha Jameel is your neighbourhood feminist-apu-who-writes-big-essays. Remind her to also finish writing her bioinformatics research paper at rasha.jameel@outlook.com